

ELEVENTH EDITION.

*Albert B. Ramsdell,
Salem, Mass.*



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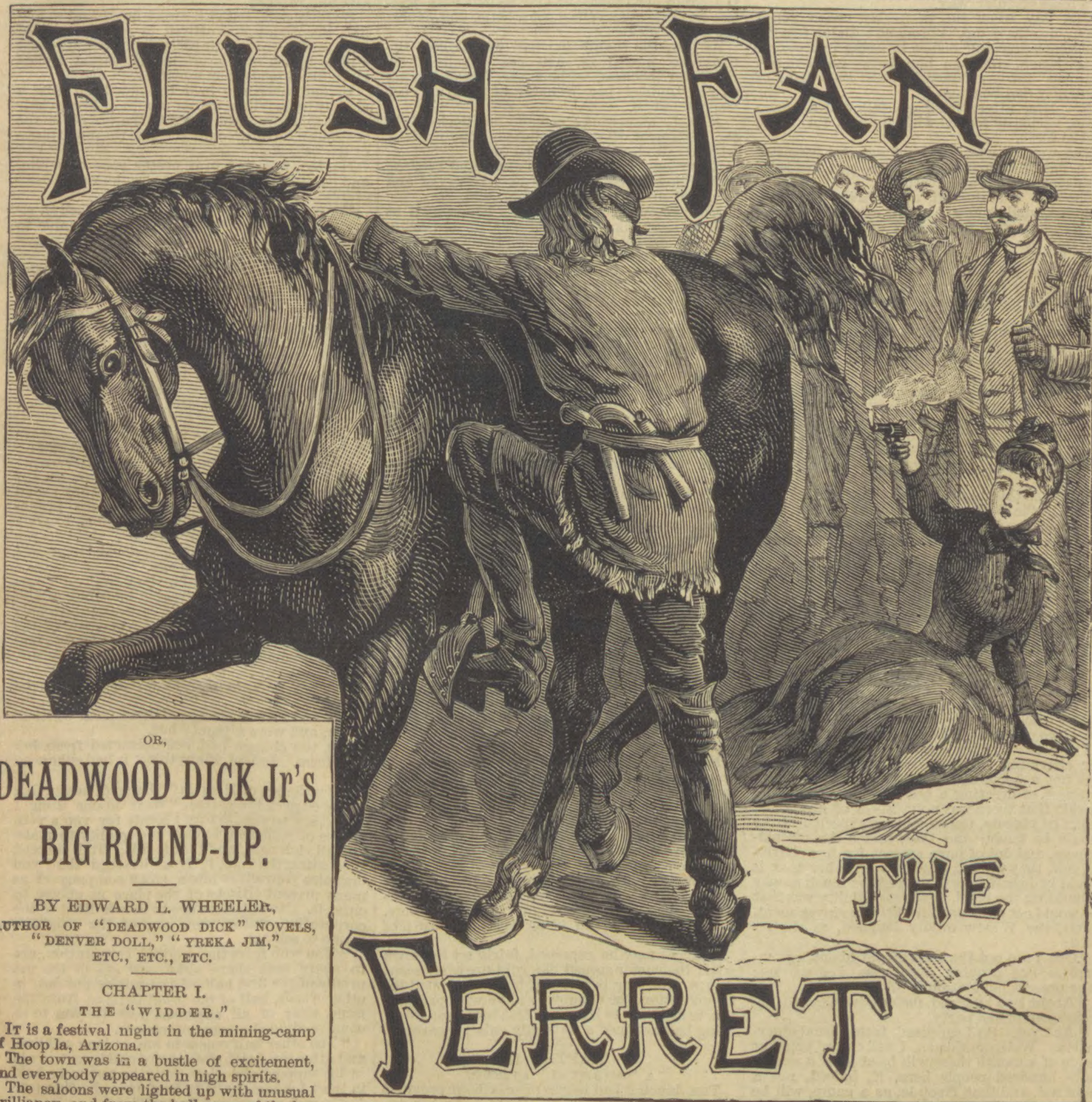
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OR,
**DEADWOOD DICK Jr's
BIG ROUND-UP.**

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"DENVER DOLL," "YREKA JIM,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE "WIDDER."

It is a festival night in the mining-camp
of Hoop la, Arizona.
The town was in a bustle of excitement,
and everybody appeared in high spirits.
The saloons were lighted up with unusual
brilliancy, and from the ball-room of the hotel
but recently built, floated dreamy strains

DEADWOOD DICK JUNIOR WAS SEEN TO REEL, AS IF ABOUT TO FALL—THEN, TO RUSH ON,
THROW HIMSELF UPON THE BACK OF HIS BLACK STEED, AND DASH AWAY.

of waltz music most soothing to the finer senses.

The hotel was specially illuminated for the occasion; the ball-room and banquet hall each were crowded with miners and citizens in general, together with their wives and daughters, mingled with whom were guests from surrounding mining-districts—all in their best attire, and apparently entering fully into the conviviality of the occasion.

Over the door of the Windsor, the name given to the new hotel, was a design of evergreens, wrought into the following sentence:

"ALL HAIL TO OUR WIDOW WREN!"

A stranger, on reading this, and noticing the gala appearance of the town, might have wondered what was the cause of this "send-off"; for, heretofore, Hoop-la had been only a common-place camp, yielding barely enough mineral wealth, to keep its population from starving.

The camp had, since its inception, been quoted as a "burg" of bad luck to all who had anything to do with mines, and miners with any ambition above getting a bare living, fought shy of it.

Even gamblers were scarce, something most unusual in a place where gold and silver were to be found for the digging.

But, at last, luck had come to the camp, and in a most singular way.

One day when the tri-weekly coach rolled down into the camp, it brought with it a female, and about fifty able-bodied laboring men—some in the coach, others on horseback—and the old "hearse" fairly groaned beneath its weight of humanity and baggage.

Not long after the stage, followed a wagon train, variously loaded with lumber, furniture, and so forth.

The woman was barely of age, yet possessed of a figure of marvelous grace, and decidedly handsome of face and feature.

She was well dressed, a charming conversationalist, and, more than all, appeared to have plenty of money, for she at once purchased a building site, and set the men to work at building a hotel.

Her name, she said, was the Widow Wren, but made no further references as to the past, and did not seem to care to take any one into her confidence.

Even her employees knew nothing about her, they having been hired by her, at various points, to come to Hoop-la, and rush up a hotel.

That the "Widder" was a most charming and beautiful young woman there was no denying, and she had not been in the camp twenty-four hours before nearly every citizen stood ready to "bet his bottom dollar,"—that there was not another "gal" in the universe, to compare with her.

However this might be, one thing was certain, although the Widow was graceful, pretty, and charming, and treated all whom she met with gracious pleasantness, she was not particularly approachable.

—The majority of the residents of Hoop-la were married men, but there were some good-looking, stalwart young fellows, who would have jumped at almost any chance to have won the Widow's special favor.

But, the lady's special favor evidently was not to be won.

While the hotel was in the course of erection, the Widow was waited upon, at a cabin where she had obtained temporary boarding, by a committee who announced themselves as the representative citizens of the camp.

Their object, they stated, was to lay before her charming ladyship, the fact that Hoop-la was not a booming camp, with any particular prospect of creating a sensation in the mining world; that there was no prospect of any great influx of visitors, unless some unexpected strike should be made; and that, under the circumstances, and out of pure respect for her charming self, they begged leave to advise her that it would be injudicious to expend too much money in building the hotel, as the probability was that she would not realize any profit on her investment.

But, the Widow mildly laughed, as she replied:

"Oh! I am not the least afraid about my enterprise not proving a success. Let me see: your present population is—?"

"About two hundred, ma'am," responded the spokesman of the party.

"Ah! yes. So I supposed, from casual observation. Well, gentlemen, I will assure you that inside of a month there will be at least a couple more hundred people here, if, indeed, not a thousand, and that Hoop-la, as a camp, will be a success!"

The committee were astounded at this assurance, and begged leave to inquire how such a thing could be possible?

The Widow then produced a small stick, containing two short prongs, and said:

"This is my wand, and I am a spiritualist. By the aid of this wand, which is controlled by spiritual direction, I can point out where gold and silver lie in paying quantities, and where there does not.

"Just before I finish the hotel, I expect to locate one of the most valuable mines ever discovered in this section."

She then very politely dismissed the astonished committee, with the assurance that they need not fear but what the hotel and town would both flourish.

The committee, after that, held numerous secret sessions, and consulted upon the matter, but could not agree as to whether there was anything in the fair Widow's claim, or not.

Arrangements were quietly made, however, preparatory to giving the Widow's hotel a rousing "opening," in case she should give proof of her professed spiritualistic power, and locate a paying mine in the camp.

Well, the workmen pushed the work rapidly on the building, and, as it neared completion it was pronounced "a daisy" by the denizens of the camp, who watched and waited with restless curiosity, marveling not a little, and doubting a great deal.

At last, the completing nail was driven, the furniture moved in, and the Windsor was ready for business, without the Widow having as yet fulfilled her promise of locating her "spirit" mine.

Already numerous strangers had flocked into the settlement, the rumor having gone forth of what the Widow had proposed to do.

Every one was excited, anxious and restless, and Widow Wren was the most observed and talked-about person for miles around.

Milt Manning, who was the handsomest as well as most popular single man, in the camp, and his associates, who comprised the committee of representative citizens, had kept a sharp outlook, to find if any attempt was made by Mrs. Wren to purchase or locate any land or claims, in the vicinity, but, as far as could be learned, her only investment had been in the site occupied by the hotel.

It was not until the Windsor had got to running nicely, and was catering to quite a little transient custom, that the Widow, one afternoon, caused to be spread around the announcement, that, at midnight, she would locate the mine, as she had promised, and Hoop-la would be a success.

Of course this set the place agog with excitement, such as had never been witnessed there before.

The town was to be a "boomer"—a gigantic success—a city, such another as could not be found, in all Arizona!

Already some of the well-minded ones began to propound the question as to who was the proper man to fill the position of "mayor" and all sorts of plans were advanced appertaining to the future of the new Eldorado.

But just before dark, a doctor was hastily summoned from the neighboring town of Cojeta and, a little later, announcement was made that the fair Widow was confined to her bed, seriously ill, and hardly expected to live.

Of course the public sympathy was greatly aroused, but no one was admitted to see Mrs. Wren, except a nurse and the doctor, from whom no particulars of how the lady was, or what ailed her could be obtained.

Matters began to assume a mysterious cast, and the people's gossip became more and more suggestive, as one week passed, and then another, and the dashing doctor's visit to the hotel continued with unceasing regularity.

Finally, however, the doctor, whose name was Lionel Lester, posted a bulletin, informing whomsoever it might concern, that Mrs. Wren had almost entirely recovered, and would, that evening, give a ball and reception, on which occasion, she would present for inspection, hers, the first child born to bring luck to the town of Hoop-la!

That, as may be supposed, fairly set the town wild; the rumor spread like wild-fire to adjacent camps, and long before the hour appointed for the reception, the camp was alive with preparation to do honor to Hoop-la's first-born, and every thing had assumed a decidedly gala appearance.

CHAPTER II.

A "SPIRITUAL" ATTEMPT.

THE dancing had begun over an hour previous to the period set for the widow to make her ap-

pearance with her new-born babe, and such of the guests as were not engaged "tripping the light fantastic toe" were either eating in the dining-room, where a sumptuous spread had been laid, or were drinking at the handsomely fitted bar, down-stairs.

On every lip might be heard remarks about the Widow or her babe, and numerous toasts of long life to them, were drank.

Finally, the announcement was made by Lionel Lester, that, owing to the crowded condition of the hotel, the Widow would make her appearance upon the piazza of the hotel, and that all who wished to get a good view of her and the babe could best do so by getting out into the street in front.

An instantaneous stampede was made for the street, and as every one in the camp had a certain respect for the Widow, no one ventured to crowd upon the piazza.

It was about nine o'clock, when some one cried:

"There she comes!"

Then there was a deafening shout of applause, as the Widow stepped from the hallway of the hotel into full view.

The moon was sending down a full flood of mellow light upon the piazza, and dwelt upon a vision of purity and loveliness such as caused the spectators to cease applauding and gaze in silent awe and rapture.

Slightly pale, but still sweet-faced and sylph-like, the Widow was attired in a rich robe of white and with her hair becomingly arranged and a little bunch of flowers at her throat, looked more like a bride than a mother.

In her arms she held the new-born babe, a chubby little fellow with a wealth of brown hair and bright eyes, who gazed at the crowd in the street as if he fully comprehended the importance of the occasion.

He, too, was clad in a pretty robe of white, and on account of his plump size, looked considerably older than he really was.

For a couple of seconds the crowd gazed in silence upon the pretty picture; then, unable to longer suppress their joy and admiration, they broke forth once more into a ringing cheer.

"Boys!" cried stalwart Milt Manning, waving his slouch hat on high, "thar's ther Widder an' ther 'kid.' Ther kid ain't got no father, as far as we kno', but yer kin bet we'll be a father to him, same's ef he was our own, an' stand by him through thick and thin. An' now, three cheers fer ther Widder and King Kid of Hoop-la!"

Unnecessary to add, the cheers were given with a vengeance, and it was several minutes ere the din of yells abated, Mrs. Wren in the mean time gracefully bowing her acknowledgment.

When she could make herself heard, she stepped nearer to the edge of the piazza, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, one and all, please accept thanks for myself and child, in return for your kind greeting. I am of course very proud of my little one, and I hope to prove my prophecy—that his birth will bring good luck to your town; therefore, I will return my child to my room, and then endeavor to locate the mine as I promised to do some time ago."

There was another outburst of applause, during which the Widow retreated into the house.

The greatest excitement prevailed: women clapped their hands, the young progeny of the camp gave vent to ear-splitting whistles, and men danced about, swung their hats in the air, and shouted at the top of their voices.

In a few minutes the Widow reappeared on the piazza.

She had made a change of dress from white to black, and wore a jaunty hat.

But the change had not detracted from her loveliness. Indeed, if anything, it had enhanced it.

"Gentlemen of Hoop-la!" she said, advancing to the edge of the piazza, "there is one thing I would say to you, before I locate for you a vein of ore of sufficient extent and quality to make you all rich men, and that is this: If I succeed in locating the vein, it is understood that you organize yourselves into a stock company of as many present citizens of the place as choose to enter it. No outsiders are to be admitted to the corporation, unless some one of the originals wants to sell out.

"You who form the original corporation, are to share and share alike, and out of the net profits of the first half of the mine's put-out, in other words, half of the profit derived from the mine, clear of all expenses, goes to you to be equally divided among yourselves.

"The other half comes to me, as long as I live, and after my death goes to my child, part to aid in his support and education; the rest to be held in trust for him, until he is of age. Is this perfectly well understood by you?"

"It is," replied Milton Manning, acting as spokesman, while the crowd echoed his words by a murmur of approval.

"And do you all solemnly swear that you will see that the terms and conditions I have mentioned, are faithfully carried out?" the Widow demanded, speaking in a more peremptory and business-like way they had ever known her to do before.

"We do!" was the answer, delivered with a degree of heartiness which ought to have been reassuring to her.

"Very well. I feel confident that you will keep your promise, and so I will trust you. Follow whither I lead, and I will show you where to dig for shining gold, that will enrich us all."

Then she descended the steps and led off, the crowd parting to let her get in advance.

The town or camp of Hoop-la, as we have neglected to mention, was situated in a wide rugged gulch, in whose serpentine course of some twenty miles, were located a dozen other camps, more or less.

There was but one recognized street to Hoop-la, which was the stage-road that ran through the gulch, and such buildings as were not on this street were scattered about promiscuously.

From the Windsor, which was located in the heart of the camp, the Widow led the way down the street a couple of hundred yards, and then turned abruptly to the left, for a similar distance.

Here she came to a pause.

It was in front of and within a few feet of a partly-burned cabin, upon whose gaunt and blackened ruins the vivid moonlight dwelt with peculiar effect.

Motioning the crowd to halt some little distance away, the widow took from the pocket of her dress the pronged stick, gazed at it intently a moment, turned it over and over in her hand, shook her head negatively, and then fixing her gaze once more on the stick, she walked around in a circle some thirty-five or forty feet in circumference.

It was observable, as she walked around, she narrowed in, a little, in making each circuit, until finally she reached the center of the original large circle.

Here she stopped, holding one end of the stick downward, and closed her eyes.

Thus she remained for several minutes, watched eagerly by the crowd, who held aloof from approaching very close to the mysterious circle.

In every camp are generally to be found persons of a superstitious nature, and Hoop-la was no exception to the rule; a number of the crowd believed that the widow was, in some way, connected with the Evil One, while others were of the opinion that her reason was affected.

Fully five minutes the beautiful woman stood there, in a statuesque attitude, her eyes closed and her face seeming to have blanched to almost a deadly whiteness; then, with a radiant smile, she opened her eyes, and the stick fell from between her fingers to the ground.

"Dig there!" she said, pointing to the stick, "and you will find gold—more gold than you can ever dig from the earth!"

"But, ma'am," said Milt Manning, stepping forward, "we have no right to dig here for gold, no matter where there hundreds of tons of it beneath us."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because the lot we are now standing upon is the lawful property of a single individual. He came to Hoop-la a couple of weeks before your arrival, looked upon the town, selected and purchased this lot, secured all Government rights to it, and took his departure, since when we have never seen him."

"His name? his name?"

"Well, we called him such names as Mum-Mouth, and the Silent Man, because he never spoke fifty words in all the time he was in the camp. The only one he give his name to was ther Government surveyor, who helped him fix up matters. Then he said his name was Boyd Berwyn."

"And he was—" gaspingly.

"About the most hideous-looking dwarf I ever sot eyes on, ma'am."

The Widow grew suddenly deathly white, tottered backward, and then, before any one could catch her, fell to the ground, with a ringing shriek of:

"Save me! Oh! save me!"

CHAPTER III.

DEADWOOD DICK, JR.

THE sensation that ensued when it was found that the Widow had swooned, can better be imagined than described.

A general cry of "Ah!" and "She's fainted!" broke from every lip, when Mrs. Wren made no attempt to arise, on falling prone upon the ground.

Milt Manning sprung quickly forward, followed by the Dr. Lester of Cojeta, who had attended her through her sickness, and together they raised her to a sitting posture.

But, she was limp and apparently lifeless, and so they laid her down again, and the doctor began to chafe her hands and employ other remedies he chanced to have with him toward restoring her to consciousness.

But the Widow lay silent and white as wax 'neath the fulsome rays of moonlight, and to all appearance was as lifeless as a dead person well could be.

And, though Doctor Lester used all remedies he had applicable to cases of fainting, they elicited no satisfactory result, and he finally shook his head in despair, after applying his ear for several seconds to the region of her heart.

"Gentlemen!" he said, looking up, "I fear the lady is dead! The mention of a name that she appeared to hold in terror, has undoubtedly shocked her to such an extent, that she, being subject to heart disease, the strain has snapped her life-strings. She is growing cold, is pulseless, and, so far as I can see, retains no signs of life. My only hope of reviving her, is by electricity; so, we will remove her to the hotel, and I will bring my battery into requisition. If that does no good, the case is hopeless."

They were just about to raise her, when a horseman, whose approach had hitherto been unnoticed, came galloping up.

Involuntarily, all eyes were turned toward him as he drew rein, for his was a phase of character seldom seen around Hoop-la Camp.

He was a man, evidently young in years, of medium stature, but fine physique.

His face could only be partly seen, for the upper portion was covered by a black mask, through the eyeholes of which gleamed a pair of orbs of magnetic intensity.

That part of his face exposed to view, was a firm but pleasant mouth, shaded by a shapely, curling brown mustache, a chin betokening firmness and manliness. His hair, of a brownish color, flowed from beneath the rim of his broad sombrero, and fell in a rippling wave over his shoulders, giving him a decidedly dashing appearance.

He was clad entirely in black, from top-boots to sombrero, not so much as a colored button relieving the somber monotony.

In a belt about his waist were a pair of revolvers.

The horse he bestrode was a strong-limbed, fiery-eyed stallion, black as coal, and evidently possessed of mettle and endurance.

Horse and rider seemed most grimly mated.

As the black horseman drew rein, only a few feet from where lay the recumbent Widow, he swept the faces of the crowd for an instant with his eagle gaze, then spoke.

"What is the matter with the woman?" he demanded, a trifle imperatively, it appeared.

"She fell in a fainting-fit a moment ago," replied Milt Manning, who always contrived to make himself heard in advance of other would-be spokesmen. "Doc Lester can't fetch her to, however, and says she is dead, and I guess most likely he is right."

"Who is she?"

"What's that to you? 'Pears like you ask a good many questions for a man who keeps his mug muzzled!"

"I fancy I have seen the lady before," was the answer, "and asked merely out of curiosity. If you do not choose to give a civil answer, why don't. It will not particularly affect me either way."

The retort rather nettled Manning, who had a bad opinion of men who kept their faces masked; but, fearing some of the crowd might give the desired information, he made answer:

"Waal, ef you want to know, et's the Widder Wren, what owns and runs the Windsor Hotel, over yonder."

"The Widow Wren, eh? And you say she's dead?"

"Yas; so the doctor says, anyhow."

The black rider turned his gaze full upon Lionel Lester for a moment, inquiringly, and then said:

"Perhaps the lady is not dead. Have you any objections to my examining her?"

"I presume that my word that she is dead, sir, ought to be sufficient," Lester replied, haughtily.

He was at all times assuming and peremptory, and never failed to impress upon the minds of his auditors the fact that he considered he knew about everything there was worth knowing.

"I am not supposed to say whether you may

examine the lady or not," he answered the stranger's request.

"Thar can't be no harm in it, anyhow," said Milt Manning. "But, stranger, I opine we'd like to know your name first, bein's you're a stranger, and hev got your face kivered."

"Oh, certainly! I am generally called Deadwood Dick, Junior, by those who are so lucky as to form my acquaintance—a namesake of the famous road-agent, Deadwood Dick, now deceased, of whom some of you, no doubt, have heard."

And then, without further hesitation, Richard slipped from his saddle, advanced, and knelt beside the apparently lifeless woman.

"Young and beautiful, ain't she?" he commented, slowly. "Been ill lately?"

This to Doc Lester.

"Yes," was the terse reply.

Dick removed the black gloves from his hand, and gently pressed open one of the woman's eyelids.

"Though one out of ten of your profession might safely pronounce her dead," he said, a moment later, "I say she is not. To prove to you my assertion, I will restore her to consciousness."

"Bah! this is not an age of miracles," sneered Doc Lester.

"On course et ain't," assented Milt Manning, "and we won't 'low no operation to be performed on her, nor no experimentin'. Ef the doctor says she is dead, why dead she is, an' so you might as well get up and dust, Mister Road-Agent! This town ain't a good climate for such as you."

"You mistake my vocation," Dick replied, quickly. "It was my predecessor who was at one time a road-agent. Listen to me a moment:

"This lady, known to you as Mrs. Wren, is not dead. I care not if a dozen doctors say so, and I will restore her to consciousness, as a proof of my assertion."

"First, however, I have something to say, that you will do well to bear in mind in the future. She is a most attractive and charming woman, and equally as shrewd and intelligent as she is beautiful. She has come here to your town, the name of which I do not even know, has mingled among you, and won the admiration and friendship of nearly every man, woman and child. Am I not right?"

"Waal, stranger, I should presume to suppose that you aire jest right. Ther Widder stands higher in ther esteem o' we folks of Hoop-la, than five aces do in a poker game, and don't you forget it."

"I supposed as much, and coming as a stranger, as she did, you can hardly be blamed for admiring her as you do. But, let me, before restoring her to consciousness, tell you this: Beneath this fair exterior lies one of the most cruel, faithless hearts, and treacherous natures, that every belonged to mankind."

"So beware! lest the serpent fairest to view sting you to the death!"

"Lookee hyer!" cried Milt Manning, angrily. "Thet's jest enough o' thet 'ar, stranger. We won't hear another word ag'in' ther Widder from one like you!"

"Of course not!" echoed Doc Lester. "It's a dirty shame to blackmail a respectable lady, especially when she is dead, and cannot refute charges made against her!" And a sullen growl from the crowd seemed to indicate that their opinion was the same.

"Very well," Dick said, quietly. "I have nothing more to say, and do not ask you to put any confidence in what I have said. I will show you, however, that the Widow is not dead!"

He seized one of the beautiful woman's hands between his own and held it there.

Suddenly the color began to rush back into her cheeks, her features began to twitch, and then, with a nervous start, her eyes opened, and she sat up.

Dick quickly arose, and waving a salute to the crowd with his hand, strode toward his horse, which had moved away a short distance to graze.

The Widow saw him, uttered a strange, gasping cry of

"Stop him! stop him!"—

then quickly drawing a tiny pistol from her bosom, sent a bullet speeding after him.

It evidently hit, for Deadwood Dick Junior was seen to reel, as if about to fall—then, to rush on, throw himself upon the back of his black steed, and dash away toward Cojeta, as if all the fiends were in pursuit of him.

And as he rounded a curve in the gulch and vanished from view, the Widow uttered another cry, and once more fell back, unconscious!

CHAPTER IV.

THE ADVENT OF FLUSH FAN.

THE Widow had fainted again!

And the crowd were fairly dumfounded with surprise and mystification.

Here, surely, was "a pretty how-d'ye-do."

What did it all mean?

By what strange power did Deadwood Dick, Junior, restore Mrs. Wren to consciousness, when Doctor Lester, considered an expert practitioner, had pronounced her dead?

Did the Widow know the masked horseman, and if so, were they enemies?

If not, why had she fired upon him, and then swooned again?

What mystery surrounded the charming Widow, anyhow?

These and similar questions rushed so rapidly upon the minds of the spectators that for several minutes they could but stand and stare at each other with expressions of utter astonishment.

Doc Lester was the first to recover from his surprise; leastwise, he did not appear to be as much surprised as the rest.

"Come!" he cried. "Why stand here like a parcel of gaping idiots? Lend a hand, some one, and let's carry Mrs. Wren to the hotel!"

There were plenty willing to assist.

So the unconscious woman was raised and borne to her room at the Windsor, where the Cojeta doctor excluded every one except himself and the nurse.

So the populace had to content themselves with waiting for a forthcoming report of their favorite's condition.

To do this, they variously resorted to the ball and bar-rooms again, and began once more the revelry of the night, a certain few only foregoing the pleasures of tanglefoot and Terpsichore, to gossip over the events that had taken place in such rapid succession.

It was in the spacious bar-room of the Windsor, where gaming and drinking were the order of the hour, that the most convivial scene was presented, and the jingle of gold and silver coin and the clinking of glasses kept accompaniment for snatches of song and roystering of jest and story.

The evening was well advanced toward midnight when a new customer entered the *Cafe Clarice*, as the drinking-department of the hotel was known.

The audience present at this time was an assorted one, or perhaps, more correctly, a heterogeneous one; for there were men of varied personal characteristics, peculiarities and appearances—bullwhackers, bummers, gamblers, tenderfeet, adventurers—such a motley human panorama as can only be found in the saloons of mining-towns of Western America.

But it is of the new-comer we would speak.

Evidently she was a stranger in Hoop-la, judging by the fact that all eyes were turned upon her in questioning surprise.

A girl she was, and such a one as caused the convivial audience of the *Cafe Clarice* to stare and silently ejaculate:

"My! oh!"

There was a good reason for it, too.

Judging from the fresh, rosy appearance of her round, fascinating face, dimpled with pretty smiles, she was not yet out of her teens.

Of good average height, she possessed a plump though not fleshy form and a charming symmetry of figure. She was attired in a rich silk dress, fashionably made, and exposing a pretty pair of ankles, the dress itself neatly fitting and delicately indicating the contours of her supple body. Besides her dress, her feet were incased in a pair of fine walking boots; a magnificently trimmed mantle was carelessly thrown about her shoulders, and upon her head she wore a jauntily-plumed hat.

In addition to as pretty, and expressive features, as a person could wish to gaze upon, she had a fascinating pair of eyes, pearly teeth, and a wealth of blonde hair, which was frizzed and puffed most charmingly, and added to the effect of making her a veritable little beauty.

One of her hands was gloved with maroon kids; upon the fingers of the other diamond-set rings sparkled and scintillated with her wonderful effect, while at her throat sparkled a necklace of unusually large diamonds and rubies, that must have cost a small fortune. In her gloved hand she carried a riding-whip, ringed with gold and the butt studded with diamonds.

All in all, she was a most attractive-looking girl, and one of whom a person would little have expected to see enter the *Cafe Clarice*, and the *cafe*, too, located in Hoop-la!

In that model mining-town, there were no female gamblers, women toughs or adven-

turesses, and what there was of the tender sex, wisely considered home as their proper place.

Hence, the advent of this extraordinary stranger was an astonisher for the *cafe* audience, and it was some seconds ere they sufficiently recovered from their surprise to realize that, according to the rules of good manners they were in duty bound to doff their hats.

Which they did, to a man.

"Evenin', to ye, lady!" saluted Milt Manning, who, although not exactly a "ladies' man," had an appreciative eye for feminine beauty.

"Beg pardon! but, perhaps you've made a slight mistake, and entered the wrong place?"

"Well, I guess not," was the reply, as the dashing stranger took a quiet survey of the premises. "I reckon this is the place where they muddle brains, and spoil human nature?"

"Oh! I see. Yes, lady, this is the *Cafe Clarice*, where the best copper-distilled Kentucky blue grass is dealt out."

"I thought I wasn't far off my reckoning. Suppose you've no objection to stepping up to the teller's office at my flip-down, have you?"

"Waal, no, I dunno as I have," Milt replied, scratching his head and wondering if he clearly understood her meaning. "If you mean drink, why, I'm yer man, from 'way back."

"Of course I mean drink. Will the other chaps also irrigate?"

"Without a doubt. Boyees, this heer bloom-in' young lady wants ter know ef we will all join an' irrigate at her expense? All in favor of the motion make manifest by saying 'Swipes!'"

To a man did the roystering citizens march up to the bar and utter the single word, in a sort of lugubrious chorus:

"Swipes!"

"Hyee, in Hoop-la, that means *infallibus whiskeesus*, or in other words, 'We never miss a geyser!'" explained Manning.

"I comprehend," was the smiling reply.

"Where did ye acquire your Latin?—in Choc-taw town or Utah?"

"In Communipaw," retorted the would-be witty miner, whose heart began to feel as if it were ready to go on strike.

The drinks were poured out; then Milt Manning said:

"Now, before we drink, fair lady, I presume you won't object to informing us whom we have the very great honor of drinking with?"

"Oh, no," was the reply, as the girl smelt of the whisky, as if to test its quality. "My name is Fannie Flush, otherwise Flush Fan, from Frisco. Not much for a name, but it's good for a year's growth of Hoop-la."

"Hurrah! Bully for you!" shouted Milt, enthusiastically. "Here's a toast to you, before we drink:

"Here's to Fan Flush, whom we'd all like to mash, A Golden Gate gal, who's a daisy; She's got gumption and grit, and diamonds and cash, An' will soon set the fellows all crazy!"

"And here's another one!" cried a deep, sonorous voice:

"Here's to Flush Fan, who's down to hard-pan, And has come here to Hoop-la to gamble— A bullet, a cry, and then she will die, And her soul will go off for a ramble!"

The next instant there was the ringing report of a pistol-shot.

Flush Fan let the glass of liquor drop from her fingers; she tottered backward, uttering a faint cry of pain, and before any one could catch her fell prone upon the floor.

Who had fired the murderous shot?

All had heard the deep, sonorous voice, without seeing the speaker—all had heard the report of the weapon, but who had seen the person who had fired the cowardly shot?

CHAPTER V.

GILA JACK'S CHALLENGE.

WAS the town of Hoop-la never to have done with these almost constantly recurring sensations?

It would seem not, for within the last few hours the people hardly had time to recover from the shock of one exciting incident before another followed.

And now Flush Fan lay upon the floor of the *Cafe Clarice*, shot down by some unseen foe, who had first given warning of his intent, by uttering a toast in doggerel verse.

For a moment, the sight of the beautiful young girl lying there before them, apparently senseless if not lifeless, seemed to daze the crowd at the bar, who had been about to drink to her health, when the shot was fired.

Milt Manning was first to spring forward to

assist the victim, but he was hurled back by the strong arm of a stalwart young man, who stood six feet in his top-boots, was proportionately well built, and handsome as an Apollo, with fine cut, noble-expressed features, a pleasant-mouth, jetty-black mustache, eyes and hair, the latter worn long down upon his shoulders, after frontier fashion.

"Stand back!" he cried. "I'll care for this girl. She is my sister!"

The announcement caused Manning to scowl, and the crowd to stare, for surely Flush Fan and the six-foot stranger, bore not the slightest resemblance to one another.

"Yas, she's yer sister!" Milt growled, significantly. "Ye ain't no more alike than a jack-mule's like an antelope!"

"That's none of your business," was the prompt retort. "When I say she is my sister, that's sufficient. Your lippping in isn't asked for or necessary."

Milt was not of a revengeful nature, but in an instant his hand grasped a cocked revolver.

"Lookeer heer! I don't know about that, my fresh flamingo! S'posin', just for fun, you give us your name before you go ter stirrin' up the air 'round here!"

The young stranger's eyes flashed, as he saw the miner's revolver and the look of resolution upon the miner's face.

"I am called Gila Jack!" he responded, promptly.

Then he bent forward and essayed to raise the apparently lifeless form of the girl.

But to the surprise of all, he, too, was sent reeling back, and an instant later, Flush Fan stood upon her feet, with a revolver grasped in either hand.

"Ah! there!" she said, with a smile. "Not this moon, young man—some subsequent moon!"

"Jerusalem!" ejaculated Milt Manning.

"Then, ye ain't shot, at all?"

"Nary a hit!" Fan replied, "but the bullet went so close past my left ear, that I could hear it chanting a dirge. Did any of you see who fired the shot, gents?"

Every man managed to say, "No, ma'am," all at once.

"Reckon ther cuss what fired the shot wasn't in this room!" Milt Manning vouchsafed. "Some galoot outside must 'a' pegged away at ye, jest fer fun, ye know."

"I don't think so!" Fan replied, with a toss of her head. "The man who attempted to take my life, is in this room, and his name is Morris Brant!"

"Mebbe this is the chap?" suggested Manning, pointing to Gila Jack, who had stepped a little to one side and was surveying the girl sport, admiringly. "He calls himself Gila Jack, and he was your brother, an' sech!"

Flush Fan turned her keen gaze upon the dark-eyed stranger; but a single glance she gave him, in which she 'sized him up,' from head to foot, saying:

"Yes, he is my brother. The man I want, is Morris Brant. Do any of you know of such a man, in this camp?"

"I reckon not," spoke up Milt, while the others shook their heads, negatively. "No sech a chap, hereabouts, that I knows of, an' I reckon I've onto 'em all what hang out in Hoop-la."

Flush Fan made no reply, but with a look of resolution upon her pretty face, walked down the room among the card-tables, a gleam in her eyes, and her revolvers ready for instant use.

It was quite evident that, if she found the man who had attempted her life, she would not hesitate to shoot him at sight.

But, although she scanned every face in the room, searchingly, she did not find the individual she appeared to be looking for, and finally restored the weapons to her belt, and returned to the bar.

"Now, boys, if you've no objections, we'll try that treat all around over again!" she said, coolly. Liquor, bartender!"

Once more the glasses were filled, but although the liquor was tossed off with evident relish, by the crowd, no more toasts were proposed.

Settling the bill, Flush Fan retired to an unoccupied corner of the room, and seating herself at a table, took a small memorandum-book from her pocket, and began to write in it with pencil.

The crowd, although greatly aroused with curiosity as to her mission in Hoop-la, refrained from approaching her, or seeking to penetrate into her private affairs—with one exception.

This exception was Gila Jack.

His gaze never left the face of Flush Fan, for

some minutes, during which time he lit a cigar, and puffed away at it, rather lazily.

He was a handsome young fellow of the brunette type, and, aside from top-boots and sombrero, was attired in a tasty suit of citizens clothing, wore a moderate display of jewelry, and was evidently a person not particularly accustomed to manual labor.

After watching the girl from Frisco for several minutes, with some show of hesitation in his demeanor, he finally sauntered forward, leisurely, arriving finally at the table where Fan was seated, and dropping upon a chair, carelessly.

Fan looked up from her writing, and stared at him, inquiringly.

"Well?" she said, interrogatively, "what do you want, mister?"

Gila Jack colored a trifle, and he seemed a little nervous.

"What do I want?" he echoed, finally. "Well—well—that is, you see, I want to—to thank you, lady."

"Thank me?"

"Yes, lady."

"Pooh! Let up on the lady racket! I'm no love-sick Juliet. What do you want to thank me for?"

"Well—well, you see, lady, I was greatly impressed with your beauty, when you entered the saloon, and was puzzling my brains how to properly form your acquaintance, when you were, as I supposed, shot, and fell to the floor. I now saw my chance and rushed forward to do what I could, but the crowd threatened to interfere, and demanded to know who I was. So, not wishing to be balked in my design to assist you, I told them I was your brother. It is for assenting to this that I wish to thank you, lady, as had you disclaimed any relationship to me, it would have made me out a liar, and an impostor, and then there would have been trouble."

"Without a doubt!" Fan replied, dryly. "You were running a big risk of getting your neck into a noose, if I know anything about it."

"Maybe so, but do you know I would willingly run the same risk again, if it would win one of your smiles, lady?"

"Pooh! If a smile is all you want, we will step over to the bar and have one at much less expense, sir," Fan laughed, gayly.

"You trifle with me," Gila Jack responded, disappointedly. "I trust you will believe me, madam, when I tell you that I am greatly enamored of you. Do not understand this as an idle expression—for it is not—the words are uttered from the depths of my heart. Will you not let me be your friend, and in return, grant me at least your friendship, which would be a priceless gift to me?"

Flush Fan regarded the fellow a moment, as if she did not know what to make of him; then, she burst into a merry laugh.

"Why, you big goose!" she exclaimed. "Of course I'll give you my friendship, providing it will do you any good. But, for gracious sake, don't lay on the agony so thick! If anything makes me feel like leaning over the side of a ship, and sending my compliments down to Jonah, it's a love-sick man! Why, it makes me feel like putting on wings and flying to the North Pole, for a roosting-place. What I like is a man with plenty of nerve, grit, gumption, genius, elbow-grease, who can whip his weight in wildcats, and is not afraid to use a cannon's mouth for a telephone, just as it's going off!"

"And I'm that very man!" cried Gila Jack, springing to his feet. "I can whip anything from an ant-eater to an elephant, from a tenderfoot to the toughest thumper in this hard town!"

"Ye can, hey?" roared a coarse, blatant voice—"ye can, can yer? Waal, young feller, as Hoss-Fly Hank, the Hair-Lipped Howler hev jest arrived in this angel city, I presume you an' I kin kick up a ninety per cent. knock-down, without ther least trouble!"

Such was the answer to Gila Jack's challenge!

CHAPTER VI.

DOC LESTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT.

FOLLOWING the words, uttered in acceptance of Gila Jack's challenge, there came a trampling of hoofs, and into the *Cafe Clarice*, through the open doors, rode a nondescript sort of human being, mounted upon a vicious-looking burro, of the scrawniest description.

Nondescript, we say, of the man, because he was in many points, wholly unlike any other man in the room.

More appropriate, by large odds, would he have appeared in some ten-cent museum, than in the gorgeous *cafe* of the Windsor Hotel, of Hoop-la.

When standing erect, he was close upon seven

feet in hight, and as slim and lank, literally, as the oft-mentioned bean-pole.

His face was spare, closely shaven, and innocent-looking as a schoolboy's, despite the fact that a considerable portion of it was taken up by a large mouth, and a wide stub of a nose, while a second peculiarity was that there was not a spear of hair visible upon his head, a fact that was discovered when he doffed his battered plug hat to the *cafe* audience.

Peculiarities did not here cease.

He wore a baggy suit of some yellow fabric, the trowsers and waistcoat of which were, apparently all made in one, and shirred in at the neck and ankles, giving him something of the appearance of a circus clown.

This queer costume, which was supplemented with stogy boots, and the battered hat, was also liberally embroidered in black—with a design meant to represent a horse-fly, and from the garment, in every part, protruded sharp-pointed thin steel needles, some four inches in length.

Millions of them, there seemed to be!

The giant was nothing more or less than a living needle cushion!

He wore no other visible weapons; but, certain it was, that any one who might attempt to hug this gigantic freak, after dark, would quickly relinquish the attempt.

And the way in which the burro he bestrode, came bucking into the *Cafe Clarice*, together with the startling aspect of the rider, caused some of the spectators, no doubt, to wonder if they had been attacked with a slight touch of the nightmare, or something of the sort.

Just inside the *cafe*, Hoss-Fly Hank drew rein, and doffed his hat, the action which exposed to view his hairless cranium.

"Gud-evenin', gentle galoots!" he shouted; "glad tew see yeou, I am. 'Haow d'ye do, anyhow, and haow aire all yer folks? S'pose ye heerd me murmur, outside, thet Hoss-Fly Hank, the Howler, hed arriv' in camp, an' war ready to smooth ther down on ther cheek of some feller w'ot sed he could lick all uv God's creation, an' part uv Riker Holler. Now, I'm thet veritable slim-shanked snoozer, who would like tew meet this breezy bucko, who aire sech a rip-snorter—I would, by gol!"

"Waal, ef you particular want to," spoke up Milt Manning, ahead of the field, as usual, as spokesman, "thar he stands, over yonder, and he calls himself Gila Jack. He's a lash-luncher, so ye better be keeful how ye tackle him!"

Hoss-Fly Hank surveyed Flush Fan's would-be lover, a moment, with a grin, as if he felt amused at Jack's hastily uttered challenge.

"Well I'll be durned!" he ejaculated.

Then, to the amusement of all, he disengaged his feet from the stirrups, allowed them to drop to the floor, arose to a standing posture, and walked demurely forward over the horse's head without lifting a hair.

This act naturally elicited a roar of laughter from the crowd, and put them in good-humor.

Paying no attention to the crowd, Hoss-Fly Hank stepped briskly toward where Gila Jack was standing, covering the distance in a few long-reaching steps.

"Waal, young feller, so you're the chap who allowed he could lick any one in ther camp, aire ye?" Hank demanded, putting his arms akimbo, and staring at Jack in evident astonishment.

"I am, sir, but I did not include human needle-cushions," Jack replied. "Remove your armor, and I will undertake to whip you so that you'll wish you had staid where you were, before you struck this town!"

Hoss-Fly Hank laughed.

"Why, ye durned greenhorn, ye couldn't lick one side of me. I'm a rip-snorter from Black-an'-tan, an' I kin lick a dozen men, single-handed. But that's neither here nor there, as the cat said when she tried ter ketch her tail, same's she did before the dog bit it off. When I come to size you up, I recognize ther sublime fact that I wouldn't offer ter spile your beauty fer all ther lucre in this world. You're too purty to kill, ef I'm any jedge o' freenology, and, besides that, I've got a bug ter put in yer ear, ef you'll step out o' doors with me. Will you come?"

Gila Jack stared at the giant a moment, and then nodded assent, whereupon the twain left the saloon.

Flush Fan watched their departure curiously, her keen eyes emitting a peculiar gleam.

"There's mischief up," she muttered, "and it is lucky I am here as soon as I am. That fellow Gila Jack is a snake, and I'll bet money on it. But whether he suspects my errand here or not, is hard to say. As for the tall galoot, he has got business with Jack, and there's no doubt in my mind but what it is of a dark nature. I would like to overhear their conversation, but just now

that seems entirely out of the question, and so I see no other way than to wait and watch. Flush Fan will spring a trap that will not only catch game but will hold it."

She went on writing in her memorandum-book, and so continued, until a second interruption occurred—at least to her thoughts.

Doctor Lester re-entered the bar-room, and was instantly besieged with all kinds of questions concerning the Widow.

A prepossessing man was the doctor.

He had a good figure, of about medium stature, and dressed most carefully. He wore a bushy full beard, of a brown color, which he always kept in good order; dark-brown eyes and hair, the latter falling over his shoulders, and as fine, literally, as silk.

His complexion was as white and his skin as fine as a woman's, and his hands correspondingly as small and shapely.

He purported to live in Cojeta, but never practiced any there, his "ride" being among the mining-camps about the vicinity of Cojeta and Hoop-la, where he had frequently performed some clever surgical operations and other medical work.

That was about all that was known of his individuality, except that he had appeared upon the scene as an attendant upon Mrs. Wren, the Widow.

When he entered the bar-room, he appeared to be rather excited, and strode to the bar and ordered whisky without answering the questions of the crowd.

When he had gulped down the liquor, he took a turn up and down the room, and in doing so, spied Flush Fan seated at the table.

He gave her a sharp scrutiny for a moment, and then did not look at her again, but returned to the vicinity of the bar, where he mounted a chair.

"Gentlemen!" he called out in a clear ringing voice, "may I have your attention for a moment?"

Instantly the jabbering of voices ceased, and all became so quiet that the dropping of a pin on the floor could have been heard.

"Gentlemen, I am sorry to inform you that your townslady is not likely to live; in fact, I do not expect her to live the night out, and while yet able to talk, she has commissioned me to wait upon you and make a most important disclosure!"

"Mrs. Wren came to your midst some little time ago, and erected you a hotel, and promised you she would locate in this camp one of the richest mines in the district. Further than this you knew literally nothing about her past."

"Well, some weeks prior to her coming, a dwarf, giving the name of Boyd Berwyn, came and purchased the claim where Mrs. Wren tonight located the mine, and took his departure. This man was Mrs. Wren's husband, from whom she had some days before Berwyn's arrival here secured a writ of separation—a qualified divorce—on the account of cruelty and unfaithfulness. Berwyn had plenty of money, but was a wretch of the worst type. However, after purchasing this claim, he grew repentant of his sins, and returned to his former wife, and sought a reconciliation, but she would have nothing more to do with him, and so he pulled out a pistol and shot himself. He did not die instantly, but lived long enough to mention purchasing the claim here in Hoop-la, which he had discovered to be a bonanza, and it was his dying wish that it go to his wife and their then unborn child. Most unfortunately, however, the dwarf expired before he could tell where the deed of the claim was, and careful search has failed to discover that the deed was ever recorded."

"Consequently, you must see what a bad shape things are left in. Still, you all know that Berwyn bought the claim; and, now, he being dead, I ask you all, is the Widow not the rightful and natural heir—she and her child which she has named Prosper, as an omen of good to the town of Hoop-la?"

A shout of assent went up, proving that the Widow had lost nothing in the way of regard with the citizens of the mining-camp.

"You bet, ef Boyd Berwyn is dead, his widdor is the heir to his claim!" cried Milt Manning, as usual to the fore.

"I am glad to hear this!" Doc Lester declared, "for it will be a source of great satisfaction to the Widow, who is already cognizant of her approaching end. She is very anxious that her offspring be well treated, and to that end has drawn up a will, bequeathing one-half of the clear profits of the mine to her child, and the remaining half to you miners who open, develop and work the mine, and see that her child has its rights."

"I am appointed executor of the will, and likewise receiver of the mine's products, at a nominal salary, and I promise you all that everything shall be conducted on a fair and honorable basis."

At this point there was another tremendous cheer, and it was some minutes ere anything like order could be restored.

Then Lester went on:

"The dying lady is greatly concerned about one matter, and requests me to mention it to you in hope that you will regulate it. She has reason to believe that an unscrupulous schemer, or perhaps a band of them, are planning to defraud her out of her rights to the mine, by, after her death, producing another claimant to the property, with such evidence as may make it seem that her baby boy is not the real heir."

"The chief instigator of this scheme is a villain of the deepest dye, named Richard Bristol, otherwise Deadwood Dick, Junior—the same chap whom you all saw once before this evening."

"Just how he will maneuver to accomplish his purpose, there is no telling at present; but, certain it is, he will not stop at a human life, if, by taking it, he can win. If the Widow's child stands in his way, he will no doubt scheme to secure its removal."

The doctor's words were not without effect, for exclamations of indignation were heard on every side; at which the doctor went on:

"Therefore the Widow, on her deathbed, has begged me to request you to band together as a corporate body of people, and sign an article which will not only entitle you to the benefits specified in the will, and protect all concerned, but will also bind you to stand up for her child and see that it has its rights, and to protect it from being defrauded in any way, shape or manner. Do you agree to this, gentlemen?—will you sign this document?"

"Ay! ay!" came the response, in stentorian tones. "We'll sign anything the Widow says!"

A smile something like triumph flitted over the face of Doc Lester as he heard the words.

"You are true types of noble manhood," he said, in complimentary tones, "and I am proud to recognize the fact, for the dying woman has placed her trust in you, to look out for her babe."

"I will now swear you to the pledge, and then communicate the intelligence, that she need have no fears for the care of her child. Milton Manning, you will please make oath, first."

Milt stepped forward with alacrity, highly pleased that he should be the first called, on such an important occasion.

Doctor Lester produced a testament from his pocket, and then said:

"Milton Manning, mind the words I utter, and afterward, repeat them. Then, you are to attach your signature to the corporate document, which is, to comprise a list of the names of those who propose to work the Prosper Mine."

"This is the oath:

"I, Milton Manning, miner, do, by these presents, solemnly swear by all I hold holy and sacred, as follows, to wit: That I will faithfully labor to promote the interests of the Prosper Mine, my co-laborers, and the babe of Marion Wren; (formerly Marion Berwyn)—that I will, with my life defend said infant from being defrauded by fraud, treachery or imposition; and that I will never, so help me God, conspire to cheat or defraud said infant, or my co-laborers out of what is justly their own. Amen!"

Manning repeated the oath, word for word; and kissed the Bible; then, signed his name to a document, the contents of which were unknown to him.

Nearly every man in the room then followed his example, after which some one called out:

"The stage! The stage!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THE STAGE BROUGHT.

THE arrival of the stage, in any mining-camp is an event of great importance to the majority of the citizens; for, as a usual thing, the stages bring the mail—papers and letters from many a mile away.

Then, too, there are many who are interested in the arrival of the stage simply because others are, for they, themselves, have no hope of receiving a single line of good or bad tidings through the mails, because they long since were lost to those who knew them in other regions.

To-night, however, the stage was late, owing to some unforeseen delay, and the rumble of its ponderous wheels, as it came tearing down into the town, caused more than one heart to thrill with hope and expectation.

Out of the *Cafe Clarice*, therefore, poured the crowd, in a stream, to form in a row on the piazza, and thus watch the stage "slow up" be-

fore the hotel, and see what passengers it brought into the mines.

The "hearse" finally drew up with a flourish, and Big Brown, the Jehu who manipulated the "ribbons," sung out in stentorian tones:

"Hoop-la! End of ther route. Change cars!"

He then clambered down from his box, and opened the door, to let out the passengers, an act of politeness he was not accustomed to practice, as he usually sat grim and surly upon his seat, and allowed the passengers to disembark as best they could.

One by one they got out of the coach but none of the even dozen, calls for our special mention.

When the last passenger had disembarked, it became quite evident why Big Brown had left his driver's seat, for, reaching into the dark recesses of the coach, he began to pull forth a pine box.

There was nothing so remarkable in this fact, until the box resolved itself into the shape of a coffin.

Not a large coffin, but about the size that would hold a child of three or four years.

An ejaculation of astonishment escaped the crowd, as Big Brown hauled the coffin-shaped box entirely out of the coach, and placed it upon the hotel piazza.

"Thunderation!" he grunted, as he deposited the burden. "I don't mind kerryin' live stock, but I'll be kicked tew death by mules, if I ever undertake to tote another corpse along in my coach."

"Who's in the box?" demanded Milt Manning.

"Dunno nothin' 'bout it. Some kid corpse, I reckon, by the size o' the box."

"But, how did you come by it—who is the owner of it, Brownie?"

"Give thet up, too. I found it waitin' at the post-offis, up to Clark's Camp. Jim Blower sed he found it outside the door, when he got up, in the mornin', an' a paper were stuck to et directin' it ter be sent to Hoop-la, by ther first stage; so Jim Blower he saddled it off onto me. An' now, I wanter know whom I'm going to get my pay from, fer fetchin' et heer? I ain't playin' undertaker, jest fer ther love o' the thing—not much!"

There was no answer.

Evidently the claimant for the strange box, was not among the crowd.

The lid of the box was tightly screwed down, but there were several quarter-inch auger-holes in it, at about the point where the face of the inclosed corpse would come.

There were no directions on the box, whatever, except two letters, near the lower end of the lid.

These letters were "W. W."

Each one of the crowd took a look at the box, but shook his head, mysteriously.

There was not a man there who was expecting any such a present; hence, there were no claimants.

"I reckon maybe some feller with a long head orter figure out what thet 'W. W.' means," suggested Milt Manning. "Most likely them's ther 'nitals fer either the corpse, or else, the one et's sent to. I propose we take the consarn into the hotel parlor, until the matter can be investigated."

This idea was acted upon, and a jury was forthwith impaneled, with Milt for coroner.

After some time had been spent in passing ideas as to whom the body might belong to, it was suggested that Doctor Lester be called in, and the rude coffin opened.

Upon the announcement of the arrival of the stage, the doctor had made an excuse that he must go and attend to his patient, and had hurriedly quitted the bar-room, to go up-stairs; so a messenger was dispatched, to summon him to the parlor.

The messenger soon returned with the information that the nurse had informed him that the doctor was not in attendance upon Mrs. Wren, and had not been for some time.

This was a source of much disappointment to those in the parlor; but after some little consultation it was decided to open the coffin and view the remains.

A screw-driver was procured, and Milt Manning was removing the screws that held down thr lid, when a faint cry was heard, evidently coming from within the box.

Milt dropped the screw-driver and got away from the box in quick order.

"Thunderation!" he gasped. "The thing's ha'nted, an' ye don't ketch me hev'in' nothin' more to do with it!"

"Bah! You're a coward!" cried a voice, and Flush Fan stepped into the parlor. "I'm not afraid to open the box."

She seized the screw-driver and set fearlessly to work, while the majority of the others looked on, but held rather aloof from the coffin, and were evidently prepared to "scoot" at an instant's warning.

Several times while Flush Fan was busied in removing the screws the plaintive cry was repeated.

"It's evident enough that we've got a lively corpse on our hands," she observed, "for the cry comes from within the box. Ah! Now we shall see."

She had removed the last screw, and taking hold of the edges of the lid, raised it from the box.

The sight that met the gaze of those who were near enough to see into the coffin was one that they probably never forgot.

The interior of the box was unlined, except for a pillow, and lying upon the hard bottom, with her head resting upon the pillow, was a child.

It was a girl, evidently, judging by its dress and delicate features—a most beautiful little girl, plump of figure and sweet of face, with sunny hair and light complexion, with the roses of health tingeing either cheek.

The eyes were closed, but otherwise there was no evidence that the child was dead or had been very near to the grim portals.

The little breast heaved naturally, and there were other indications that the little one was in perfect health.

It was dressed in a plain print gown and shoes and stockings, and clasped to its breast by one little arm was a wax-faced doll, rather prettily attired, and almost as tall as the child itself.

Such a sweet picture the men of Hoop-la had never before gazed upon under similar circumstances, and for a moment both they and Flush Fan stood literally spellbound.

Then Fan bent forward and raised the child from the box into her arms.

Her touch seemed to arouse the little one from what seemed to be a lethargy, and the lips moved in speech.

"Papa! papa! Me want my papa!"

But the eyes remained closed.

"Your papa, pet," said Flush Fan, stroking the child's sunny hair. "Open your eyes, and tell me who your papa is."

"Me tan't open my eyes—me tan't see. Me want my papa!" was the reply, in plaintive tones, that caused a shudder of sympathy and horror to pass over those who heard the words.

What was this?

The little stranger could not see!

Was it blind? Had some foul plot been worked against it, a part of which had been to consign it to a living death in the coffin?

The thought was too horrible to contemplate, and yet, why was the child found thus in the coffin, and what was the mystery of its presence there?

"Gentlemen!" Flush Fan said, "we are upon the eve of making a strange discovery. This little stranger has been placed in this box and sent here for a purpose, but whether for a good one or a bad one remains to be found out."

"Perhaps many of you may wonder as to who I am, and what is my errand here in Hoop-la. Therefore, I might as well tell you at first as at last, that I am a detective, and I have come here to work out the facts of one of the greatest cases in the history of all this region. Thus far, of course, I have not had a chance to do anything in particular, but I believe that in choosing your town as the seat of my operations I have chosen right."

"This child may or may not be connected with my case, but for the present I wish to take charge of it, and be as a mother to it, until I find out all about it."

"I don't suppose any one can have any reasonable objections to that, eh?"

"Waal, no, not so fur as I'm concerned, tho' of course we don't know much about you," responded Milt Manning, hesitatingly. "What d'ye say, boys?—shell ther gal have the keeps o' the kid, or no?"

"Kinder strikes me as she wants it the most o' any one," allowed a miner.

"I do want it more than any one," replied Flush Fan. "I am most fitted to take charge of it, and it may aid me to ferret out the mystery concerning it."

"I propose, first of all, we question the child more!" suggested another of those present. "We've all got equal rights to know what the child has got to say for itself."

"Oh! I'm not particular about that," Fan replied, carelessly, although it was evident to some that she would have much rather ques-

tioned the child alone and in private. "What is your name, pet?"

"Me name Bessie. Me want my papa!" was the reply, while she clung tighter to her doll.

"Me blind, and tan't see me dolly any more."

"What else is your name besides Bessie?"

"Me don't know. Me fordet."

"Where do you live?"

"Me live—me don't know where. Me live with papa an' mamma. Mamma threw somefin in my eyes, den me hear papa cry, 'Don't kill me, for Dod's sake!' Den I get struck, an' fordet everyt'ing. Den me wake up, an' tan't see. Me ask for me papa, an' some one tell me he is dead. It make me cry; den me get whipped, awful hard."

"What next, dear?"

"Me ask for me dolly, an' me mamma, den some one tell me I'se a nuisance, an' dey kill me if I cry. Don dey say dey send me to me mamma, an' dey shut me in some place, an' I fordit. Me don't want me mamma—me want me papa."

"Why don't you want your mamma?"

"Me mamma bad. She beat Bessie, when papa gone away, an' she swear an' curse papa, when he turn back. She shoot at him with a dun, an' she t'row sumfin' in Bessie's eyes, so she tan't see, an' it hurt awful much. Mamma awful bad, an' wish me dead, an' me papa dead. She tell us awful wicked names!"

Flush Fan turned to the astounded crowd of spectators and listeners, with flashing eyes.

"Men of Hoop-la," she said, "you will at once see, by this little child's statement, that some terrible crime has been committed—perhaps more than one crime, too—of which the child has been a victim. From appearances, some female demon is at the bottom of the matter—some heartless wife and mother who has purposely blinded her child, killed her husband, and then fled."

"This matter needs thorough investigation, and, by Heaven, it shall have it, or my name is not Flush Fan. That this child's mother is in this camp appears evident from the fact that the child has been sent here, and judging, too, by the story she tells. There is a mystery here, but I shall undertake to solve it, and for that reason I want the custody of this child. Am I to have it, or am I not?"

"I should say not," replied a voice, and Doc Lester stepped into the room. "If the child has been subjected to the indignity of being blinded, it is necessary that it should be examined by a physician, who may be able to do something toward restoring its sight. Therefore, I would suggest that it be placed jointly in the charge of myself and the nurse whom I have employed to wait upon the late Mrs. Wren, rather than in the hands of a total stranger!"

"The late Mrs. Wren?" echoed several bystanders.

"Exactly, for the spirit of the good lady has just passed away into another, and it is hoped, a better world," the doctor replied. "I just returned to her room, a few minutes ago, in time to hear her last words. She wished me to thank you people of Hoop-la for the kindly interest you had taken in her, and left her babe and its interests in my care and under my guardianship. She also expressed it, as her last wish, that she be buried as soon as possible, and that no one but the nurse and myself be permitted to view her remains. As she bound me by a promise to see that this wish was fulfilled, I shall see that it is so."

"As for this waif, who has been mysteriously thrown upon our hands, I think you will all see the advisability of committing it to my charge, as, with my nurse's aid, I can give it every attention!"

"And I say you shall not have charge of it!" Flush Fan cried, resolutely. "I will look out for the child, myself!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COUNTERPARTS AND A GLIMPSE OF THE END.

ABOUT the time that Hoss-Fly Hank and Gila Jack left the *Cafe Clarice*, or rather, a very few minutes afterward, a little scene was occurring, out-of-doors, which it becomes our duty to notice.

The main entrance to the Windsor Hotel, from the piazza, was a broad hallway, from which a winding staircase led to the second story.

The double doors opening upon the piazza were usually thrown open, owing to the mildness of the weather; below, a couple or three yards, was the door of the so-called *cafe*.

A few minutes after Hoss-Fly Hank and Gila Jack had left the *cafe*, a man came down-stairs, and walked out upon the piazza.

After glancing sharply around him, he left the piazza, crossed the street, and walked away among the houses that had not the distinction of being located on the street front.

About ten minutes' walk brought him beyond the immediate vicinity of any houses or tents, and here he halted under the shade of a large elm tree, down through whose branches the moonlight shone in silvery bars.

Here he waited perhaps five minutes, when a second man came up, and the two stood face to face.

It was now observable that the twain were perfect counterparts, so far as appearance was concerned.

We have hitherto briefly described Doctor Lester to the reader, hence we have only to say that one of these men was the doctor, and the other, of course was not, although in every respect did he resemble the Cojeta physician.

He was dressed precisely the same, to the minutest detail, and looked precisely the same, in face and carriage—even carried a walking-stick similar to the doctor's.

The two surveyed each other a moment in silence, and then the one last arrived, said:

"The make up is excellent, and will pass. You look so much like me as to almost make me doubt if you are not really myself."

"Then, I am satisfied. I have no fear of detection, if my disguise is so perfect as that," the other answered, with a laugh. "The only trouble will be, to keep control of my voice."

"Oh! you will easily succeed in doing that. I suppose, now, that everything is being arranged to your liking, so far as I am concerned, that you will not have any more need of my co-operation?"

"None. The time has come when it is necessary for you to carry out your part of the contract, and leave for parts far from here. Where do you intend to go?"

"I have not made up my mind, exactly. I have always entertained a desire to go to Southern France, but cannot afford to. The fact is, you are paying me so little for this job that I cannot get out of the United States!"

The counterpart uttered a low ejaculation of displeasure.

"You must!" he declared, grimly. "You promised me that you would, and you must!"

"Must is a big word sometimes," the doctor observed, quietly. "Maybe I did promise you I'd leave the States, but if I can't I can't."

"Why can't you, pray?"

"Because I will not have enough money to live on any definite length of time. You're not paying me enough for this job!"

"Bah! It's no use for you to try to work that racket on me. You made your own price, and I accepted it and paid you all but the last installment. That I have brought with me. When I pay you it, our bargain is settled, so far as I am concerned."

"I am not so sure about that. I've made up my mind that I've been too cheap on you. You've got money, and you've got an important secret, and it will be to your interest to deal liberally with me, if I know anything about it."

"Do you mean by that, that you would go back on your word, and break your promise to me?"

"Well, there's no telling what a man may be tempted to do, to acquire money. I haven't said, in so many words, that I wouldn't keep your secret, but it would undoubtedly be to your interest to add another thousand dollars to the thousand you promised to pay me to-night. That will not only keep my tongue forever quiet, in regard to what I know of your affairs, but I will leave the States, and you will have the undisputed honor of being Doctor Lionel Lester, M. D."

"Curse you! I'll give you no such sum!" the other cried, fiercely. "I'll pay you the one thousand dollars, as I promised you, but not a cent more. And I'll dare you to betray me!"

"You will perhaps dare the wrong man!" Lester said, significantly. "As I cannot get along without the two thousand, there will be no use of your paying me the one. My practice here in the West is worth more than a paltry thousand a year!"

His coolness, and apparent resolve to go back on some previous agreement to the effect that he was to give up his name and business and leave the country, seemed to infuriate his counterpart for, uttering a smothered oath, he bounded toward the Cojeta doctor, with something glittering in his grasp.

The doctor also drew a knife, and then and there the two men had a brief but determined encounter, during which steel flashed against steel, in a way that made the sparks fly.

Then, finally, one of the men uttered a groan,

tottered, and fell backward, with the weapon of his adversary plunged to the hilt in his breast.

"Ha! so you would betray me, after I had employed you at a big price, and let you enough into my secrets, so that you thought you held a power over me, eh? Oh, you snake! I am glad if I have killed you!" the victor cried, as he bent over the motionless form of the Cojeta doctor. "Yes, he is dead, and I am rid of him, for good, as soon as I get rid of the body!"

The murderer regarded the fallen man a moment thoughtfully; then drawing a small silver whistle from his pocket, blew a sharp, shrill blast upon it.

Directly, the signal was answered by a similar one from another part of the camp; then, a few seconds later, two men came striding up to the spot where the pseudo-doctor was standing.

One was the long-geared giant, Hoss-Fly Hank while the other was the dark-faced individual, who had announced himself as Gila Jack.

"Hillo! 'tain't fer us, after all!" Hoss-Fly Hank ejaculated, pausing and surveying the doctor—as we shall hereafter call him—and his victim, suspiciously.

"Yes, it is for you!" the doctor replied. "I am the captain in disguise. Do you see this stiff?"

"Yas. Who knifed him?"

"Oh! he met me, thought I was his double, and so committed suicide," the doctor replied, with a coarse laugh. "I want you fellows to take the body and bury it somewhere, where it will never come to light. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, boss."

"See that you heed, then. If he has any valuables on him, you can have 'em, for doing the job. But first give an account of yourselves—you first, Jack."

"Well, captain, I've been obeying orders the best I can, and hain't made no discovery yet, for positive, tho' I have a suspicion."

"What does it center on?"

"I don't know yet, but I kind of reckon that Deadwood Dick, Junior is in this camp in disguise. I've laid several decoys, and hope to learn something definite concerning him shortly."

"Very good. Hang around town, and keep a sharp lookout. If you get your eyes on him, never leave track of him, until he is cold and still, six feet in under ground. You know the thousand dollars will be ready for you as soon as you bring the proofs of the fellow's death."

"All right, captain. I'll do the very best I can," Gila Jack assented, his eyes glittering eagerly at the mention of the money inducement.

The captain then turned to the giant.

"Well?" he demanded, interrogatively, "what brings you here? I thought you had orders to stay up the mountain."

"So I hed, capt'in," Hoss-Fly Hank answered, half apologetically; "but yer see, I found out suthin' was goin' wrong, an' I felt as ef et war my duty ter give yer warnin' beforehand."

"Something gone wrong?" echoed the doctor. "What do you mean? Speak quick. Has the old—"

"He is all safe. Ye needn't fear but I'll keep my grizzly b'ar safe, as long as the pay is forthcoming."

"Then, what's the matter?"

"Well, I war over to old Mag's last night, an' she complained as how you warn't doin' the square thing by her, and she was goin' ter send the kid to Hoop-la, first chance she got, as she didn't want no more bother with et. She war dead in 'arnest, an' sed she had made up her mind to turn religious, an' wouldn't have the child no longer, so she should box it up, an' send et to you by stage."

"Box it up?"

"That's what she sed, an' as thar comes the stage, I allow ye mought be on the lookout for it!"

"Ten thousand devils! If this be true, I'll murder the old hag. Look out for this body now, and put it where it can't be found."

Then turning, the counterfeit doctor hurried toward the Windsor Hotel, before which the stage was landing its passengers.

CHAPTER IX.

A HOME FOR LITTLE BESS.

THE words of Flush Fan, as uttered in the parlor of the Windsor Hotel, and which were to the effect that Doc Lester should not have possession of Blind Bessie, created a murmur of surprise among those who were present, for Fan spoke decisively, and in an instant her right hand clutched a cocked revolver, while the little stranger was held in her left embrace.

"You shall not have possession of this child!"

she repeated, regarding the doctor defiantly. "You will have plenty to do at present to attend to the other babe that you claim has been left in your care. As for this one, I claim to have the best right to it until I trace out the mystery concerning it!"

The doctor sneered, and regarded the girl from the Golden Gate fiercely.

"Oho! So the tigress shows her teeth, does she?" he said, sarcastically. "You can put up your weapon, young woman, for there will be no occasion for you to use it, so far as I am concerned. I leave it all to the people of Hoop-la, if I am not the more fit person to have charge of the child. If they decide in the affirmative, they can, no doubt, force you to relinquish the little stranger without incurring any bloodshed."

"That remains to be seen!" Fan cried, still defiantly. "This child is the victim of a foul wrong, and I, as a detective and an avenger, mean to ferret out and punish the one who destroyed the dear little creature's eyesight. So, I'll not give up the child without a struggle. Tear it from me if you will, but before you do, some one will feel suddenly sick."

And the resolute gleam in her eye, seemed to argue that she was not indulging in an idle threat, but was prepared to put her threat into execution.

The crowd gazed at her, partly in anger and partly in admiration.

She stood with her back against the wall—a beautiful girl at bay.

Milt Manning scrutinized the faces of his associates, as if to "size up" their thoughts upon the subject of the proper custody of the child; then, he said:

"Waal, et 'pears ye both must want the baby purty bad, an' fer that reason, et strikes me as neither of ye orter have et. Now, there's Jeb Wolf's sister Suse, who aire a peart, good sort o' woman, an' has a purty hard time to get along, by her washin' an' mendin'. She likes children, an' I propose we chip in an' hire her to take keer o' this young 'un, until suthin' turns up. Et will help Suse along a powerful lot, an' the child will be in good hands. What d'ye say, boys?"

There was a shout of assent from nearly all present, except Doc Lester and Flush Fan.

"That's the ticket!" cried a number of voices. "Suse Wolf aire the proper gal to take charge o' the baby."

"I object!" interposed Lester. "The child needs an experienced doctor and surgeon's attention, and as I guarantee to defray all its expenses out of my own pocket, I claim that I am rightfully entitled to full possession."

"Can't help that!" Milt replied, decisively. "The boys all sez 'Suse,' and as they are a majority, they win. What's your think, Miss Fan?"

"My think is that, rather than have the child fall into the hands of this saw-bones, I'll surrender it to Miss Suse, providing of course that she is a proper person to have charge of it, and I may be permitted to visit the child whenever I please. On those conditions will I surrender the little stranger, but on no others. If you try to take her from me against my will, I blow her brains out, for, better a thousand times she be dead, than fall into the power of the man you call Doctor Lester!"

The doctor reddened angrily at this thrust, and took a step toward the dashing Frisco Ferret.

"Curse you!" he hissed. "I'll make you retract that insult, you brazen adventuress; I'll—"

"Dry up, or get knocked on the head!" cried Milt Manning, sending Lester back, with a push. "No more quarreling around here, or we'll all take a hand. It's settled that Blind Bessie is to be given out to board wi' Suse Wolf, an' Flush Fan is to have the privilege of visitin' the child as often as she wishes. So that settles that!"

The doctor uttered a smothered oath, and turning upon his heel, left the room.

Milt Manning then offered to show Fan the way to Suse Wolf's cabin, and they set out together, Fan carrying little Bessie, who clung closely to her doll, and repeatedly cried, in plaintive tones:

"Me tan't see. Me want my papa!"

"Don't worry, little one. Perhaps your sight may yet be restored to you, and if your papa is living, perhaps we can find him."

But Bessie shook her head, knowingly.

"No! no!" she said. "Naughty bad mamma shoot papa with gun. Me couldn't see, but me heard papa say 'Oh! oh!' an' then didn't speak again."

"How long ago was this, pet?"

"Me don't know. Me fordor."

"Did your papa and mamma often get angry at each other and quarrel?"

"My mamma very cross and scold papa, sumfin 'bout money. Den papa him don't like it an' cry, an' Bessie cry too. Den mam frow things at papa, an' almost hit him, an' when him go out-doors, she lock the door, so he can't get in. Den she whip Bessie for nofin, an' put her to bed."

"She must have been a reg'lar devil!" Fan remarked, addressing Manning. "What a pity it is the child is not a little older, so as to be able to tell more. Are you quite sure, Bessie, that you do not know your papa's name?"

"Me tall him papa. Mamma tall him old brute. Me fordor his odder name."

By this time they had reached the Wolf cabin, and found Miss Susan at home.

She was good-natured looking, and evidently a good-hearted woman, of some two-and-thirty years, and when the proposition was made to take little Bessie to board, she at once accepted, being greatly delighted, for she was not only very fond of children, but the sum that Milt offered to pay her per week would preclude the necessity of her taking in washing for a living any longer, as had been her late occupation.

She promised to give little Bessie the best of care, and after being satisfied on this score Milt Manning took his departure, leaving the spinster and the girl detective.

They talked the matter of the child's strange history and possible identity carefully over, but could come to no satisfactory conclusion, except as Fan added:

"There's one thing certain. There's a deep mystery surrounding the child, and a foul outrage has been perpetrated upon her by one whom she calls 'mamma,' and possibly a murder, in the bargain. The fact that the child has been sent here seems to argue that this criminal mother is even now in this camp, in disguise. Do you know of any one who might be suspected?"

"I do not. I know every woman in the camp and I am satisfied that none of them could be the mother of this little one, as they are all honest, every-day people."

"Except the Widow Wren, who died, to-night?"

"Mercy! She is not dead?"

"So the doctor has announced, and he also declares that it was her last wish that no one should view her remains before burial, except himself and the nurse!"

"How very strange!"

"That's what I think. It is claimed by this doctor that the Widow made a dying confession to him, that she is, or was, the divorced wife of a man who came here, and purchased a mining-claim, and then disappeared, again. He was a dwarf, and known as Boyd Berwyn. Do you know anything of him?"

"Nothing more than that I saw him, when he was in the camp."

"What kind of a looking man was he?"

"Short and deformed, and not very good-looking in countenance, although I have seen many a worse-looking man. He appeared to be a very quiet person."

"How long after his departure, did Mrs. Wren come?"

"Not long. About two weeks, I think. By the way, this cabin I occupy, stands partly on the Berwyn claim."

Flush Fan was silent a few moments, engaged in watching little Bessie, who was sitting on Susan's lap, engaged in caressing her doll, which she could not see. For she never once tried to open her eyes.

"Do you see anything in the child that reminds you of either the Widow, or the dwarf?" Fan finally asked.

"Yes," Susan replied—"that is, of the dwarf. Although she is of course much prettier than he probably ever was, even in his youngest days, I can see a slight resemblance."

"Then, in conclusion, do you know of, or have you ever heard of a man, in this vicinity, by the name of Morris Brant?"

"No. The name is unfamiliar to me."

Fan did not ply any more questions, but kissing Bessie good-night, went back to the hotel.

CHAPTER X.

DEADWOOD DICK'S WARNING.

WHEN another day dawned over Hoop-la, succeeding what had been such an eventful night, the people were earlier astir than usual, for Doctor Lester had announced that, according to the expressed wish of the deceased, the remains of Mrs. Wren would be buried at sunrise.

A grave had been dug during the night on a little knoll overlooking the town, and a carpenter had fashioned out a plain coffin and lined it

with cloth. This was the best that could be gotten up in Hoop-la for the accommodation of the remains.

The coffin was deposited by the carpenter and his aide outside the door of Mrs. Wren's room, after which it was carried into the room by Lester and the nurse.

After that no more was seen of it until morning, when four bearers of Lester's selection bore it down-stairs into the parlor, where a short service was to be conducted by a preacher, who was newly arrived in the camp.

The disappointment was general when it was found that the lid of the coffin had been tightly screwed down, so that there was no chance to see the corpse.

Considerable disappointment was expressed at this procedure, but Doctor Lester finally succeeded in smoothing the matter over, and the services took place.

Nearly all of Hoop-la's population was collected in and about the hotel, and followed the remains to the grave.

Here a simple prayer was said, the box lowered into the pit, and covered from view by shovelful after shovelful of dirt.

And the people—for there were no perceptibly grief-stricken mourners—went away from the tomb, commenting variously upon the peculiar circumstances of the Widow's coming to Hoop-la, and of her sudden taking off, leaving behind her an infant child.

After the funeral was over, Doctor Lester addressed a meeting of citizens composed of those who had signed the document agreement, and the result was that he was elected president and treasurer of the Prosper Mining Co., and Milt Manning was appointed superintendent and general manager of the work of opening and developing the mine.

No delay was to be made in the work, and so, after Lester's speech, the miners shouldered their picks and shovels and set out for the Berwyn claim, to break earth at the spot where the Widow had dropped the pronged stick she had designated as her wand.

The stick was found where it had been dropped, but something else was also found by the motley raft of miners.

This something was a large sheet of paper attached to the door of the cabin ruins, which was still standing in position.

The paper was covered with reading that had evidently been lettered with a small brush, and read as follows—read in such a decidedly suggestive and threatening way that the men of Hoop-la were forced to peruse it several times over, and then stare at each other with expressions of inquiry and doubt, not unmingled with anxiety:

"MEN OF HOOP-LA!

"Notice is hereby given you that I, the agent of Boyd Berwyn, who owns this claim, will personally take the authority of ordering none of you to attempt to work this claim, unless you account for two-thirds of all mineral substance found, by paying it into the hands of Susan Wolf, who is in charge of Boyd Berwyn's only child and heir, Bessie Berwyn. Any failure to conform with this order will bring down my vengeance upon the head of the offender. The days of Marion Berwyn are numbered. Beware lest you, too, invite your own doom!"

"DEADWOOD DICK, JR."

Such was the notice nailed to the door of the nearly ruined cabin, as a warning to the men of Hoop-la.

Had the earth been shaken by an earthquake, they could not have been more surprised than at reading this manifesto of a man they had never seen or heard of but once—the successor of the once notorious Deadwood Dick.

What did it all mean?

Dick, Junior, the agent and the protector of the interests of Boyd Berwyn?

And little Blind Bess the only child of the dwarf who had legally assumed the claim?

Then who was the babe up at the Windsor Hotel, and who was the woman who had only that morning been buried at the knoll, over across the gulch?

For some time the miners were in a high state of confusion and excitement, and not the stroke of a pick was made.

The miners were in a hurry to go to work, but this matter must be explained and settled before they ran any unnecessary risks.

"I tell ye, boys, et's nothin' but a scare, and we ortn't take any notice of it," Milt Manning allowed, grimly. "Ye know what ther doctor told us, about an attempt bein' made to cheat the leetle baby up at the hotel out of its rights. Waal, by Jingo! I jest b'lieve this is the first out-croppin' of it, an' this cuss who wears an outlaw's handls aire tryin' ter play us fer a passel o' rools!"

"You are right!" cried Doc Lester, coming up, he having been sent for in hopes that he might be able to quiet the confusion. "Why, boys, it's just as plain as the noses on your faces. The poor Widow, now lying cold and silent in her grave, left word for you to expect and be prepared for this. My only wonder is that you have taken the second glance at that notice. It is preposterous and absurd, and shows itself to be a cheat on the face of it. Look, for instance, at the way that blind child was sent here last night. Why, I tumbled to it at once that it was part of a plot to work it in as an heir to this claim; but, of course, I said nothing, for I wanted you to get your eyes open."

"Waal, I can't see as they are very widely opened, 'cordin' to your views, yet," cried a stalwart young fellow named Henderson, but better known as "Mohave," from the fact that a trifle of Mohave blood was supposed to course through his veins—one of the biggest dare-devils in the camp, and withal big-hearted, and the owner of many warm friends. "Tain't quite plain to me that you are the only one as has got any reasonin' faculties, in this hyer camp, boss!"

"Who are you, indeed, that have got so much chin?" retorted the doctor, giving the miner a contemptuous glance. "When you are asked for your opinion you will no doubt be called upon to give it!"

"Yas, and you'll be called upon to hear it, now!" was the answer. "My handle's Mohave, if you want to know it, and I'm composed of a hundred and seventy pounds of man. If you doubt it, the chance is open to put the matter to a test!"

"I'll not stoop to bandy words with you, sir. As for the rest of you, boys, I beg you will not pay any attention whatever to that notice, nor recognize the blind girl as having any claim upon this property, for I assure you she has not. The child was pushed forward in the way she was, to prey upon your sympathies, and now, this rascal of an outlaw, who dared not show his face unmasked, seeks to transform the blind chit into a full-fledged heiress, and cheat a sweet little orphan babe out of its rightful inheritance. It's a shame and a crime, and no punishment is too good for the would-be perpetrator of such a heinous scheme!"

"Boys!" cried Mohave, stepping forward, "thar's always two sides to a question, an' now that Pills has got done, I'd like to flip in edgewise."

"In my opinion, that blind gal has bin the victim of a devilish outrage, an' has been blinded, purposely, so as not to be able to point out some criminal. An' et looks like to me as if she might be Boyd Berwyn's heir, 'stead o' t'other 'un. I tell yer, et's best to look on both sides o' a stump before ye set down ag'in one side, for fear a skunk may be on t'other side that would give you fits!"

"Now, that baby told a clear, straight story, an' sed as how her mom throw'd suthin' in her eyes, and then tried ter kill dad. Now, et don't stand ter reason that a little kid like that, an' blind in the bargain, aire goin' on to tell anything but the truth!"

"That has nothing to do with her being Berwyn's child!" interrupted the doctor, impatiently, and seeing that the crowd were giving Mohave considerable attention.

"You shut up, or I'll wallop you over the head!" the young athlete retorted. "I'm wagging my word-works, just now, so you keep still."

"As I was goin' ter say: thar's another thing well to remember. Thet aire woman, the widder, whom I individually never keerd much for, she came hyer, without our knowin' anything about her, either who she was or what she was."

"She put on a big flourish, slammed up ther hotel, told us we war goin' to be a second New York, in no time. She made her brags that she was goin' ter locate a big mine fer us, with the aid o' ther speerits, but she put et off 'til we got suspicious, when she went an' planked a stick down on the Berwyn tract."

"When she heerd who et belonged to, she fainted, or let on to. Waal, now, this heer doctor tells us that she told him that she was the divorced wife o' Boyd Berwyn, yet she wants us ter acknowledge her babe as ther natteral heir to ther claim. I tell ye, boys, thar's kinks, somewhere, and I'd jest as soon believe little Bessaire the real heir, as not, an' a little ruther. We don't even know the Widder was the mother of the kid, up at the hotel!"

There was an exclamation of approval from several of the crowd, as the Mohave drew to a close.

His argument had struck his particular admirers as being strong and effective, and his admirers in the camp were not few.

"What do you mean?" Doc Lester demanded, hotly. "Do you mean to insult me, sir, by insinuating that I lied in regard to Mrs. Wren's giving birth to the child?"

"Waal, I'm not so positive sure but what I do!" Mohave retorted, coolly. "You see, ther matter is I don't like you for a cent, Doc, an' I've got an opinion of you that's rather out of sorts. I don't say outright about the kid, but yer know lyin' is a sin ther human flesh is heir to, an' I don't allow yer skin is any better nor any one else's, ef yer aire white-livered!"

This speech caused a titter of laughter, and the doctor fairly gnashed his teeth with rage.

"Curse you!" he hissed. "I'll be revenged upon you for these insults!"

"Don't mind him," put in Milt Manning at this juncture, he having been looking for an opening. "I see how it all is, Doc, an' I allow the majority o' ther boys looks thr'u' ther same sort o' eyes as I do. Eh, boys? And, as fer Mohave, here, et's easy ter see why he takes up for the blind child. Yer see, he's engaged ter Suse Wolf, and all ther gold thet goes into Suse's hands, he expects to get a whack at."

"You're a liar by the clock!" cried Mohave, quickly. "I don't deny I'm engaged to Suse, but thet hain't got nothin' to do with the kid. I believe the gal's Boyd Berwyn's lawful heir, an' I'll stand by my opinion!"

"Bah! for your opinion!" cried Milt, snapping his thumb and finger contemptuously. "You're nothin' but a half-breed!"

"But I'm a man, every inch of me!" Mohave cried, striding up to Manning, "and I'll give you proof of it!"

With that, he hauled off and slapped his fellow-miner across the mouth, the report of the concussion being audible for some distance.

Milt staggered back with a howl of rage, but immediately rushed forward, and the two clinched.

This was a signal for an attempted interference by the friends of both parties, and as might have been expected, in a moment the whole crowd was fighting among themselves, and hammering away at each other with a will.

All except the doctor.

He had wisely withdrawn out of easy reach of the conflict, where he paused, an interested spectator of the riotous scene.

"The ice is broken!" he chuckled softly. "I could not manage all these men, and I am glad that a split-of-the-difference has occurred, for it will enable me to pick out the men I can depend on and handle."

The scrimmage was of short duration, when the combatants parted, and drew aloof from each other, neither side losing a man, although there were plenty of bloody noses and blackened eyes.

At the doctor's invitation, Manning's crowd then adjourned to the hotel to drink.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE WOOING.

FROM the steps of the Windsor Hotel, Flush Fan had watched the commotion that Deadwood Dick, Junior's, bulletin had created among the miners, and the fracas that subsequently followed.

She did not venture near enough to immediately learn the cause of the fight, but had no difficulty in forming a conclusion on the matter.

She had been down in the vicinity of the claim early in the morning, and seen the notice, but had refrained from making known her discovery preferring to let the miners make it for themselves.

"The notice has created a split among the miners," she concluded; "one party evidently believes in the announcement, and the other not. Ah! the doctor and some of the men are working this way, while the rest stay behind. The doctor's gang, I presume, favor the Widow's child, while the others favor little Blind Bess. As the parties are about evenly divided, it looks very much as if there would be bitter trouble yet."

"I'd strike now, but for two things. First, I must find Morris Brant, and secondly, I must solve the mystery that lingers around the fate of Boyd Berwyn!"

Not desiring to encounter the crowd coming toward the hotel, Fan left the piazza, and sauntered leisurely off up the gulch.

It was a beautiful, sunny forenoon, with clear skies and mellow sunshine, and, as common in that semi-tropical clime even at that late season of the year, the day was warm and delightful,

with gentle breezes blowing down from the mountains.

The girl detective had no particular destination in view, on leaving the hotel, but sauntered leisurely along the northern stage trail, her mind busied in thought, while her gaze was fixed upon the ground over which she was passing.

It was not until she had passed beyond the habitable limits of the camp that she was aroused from her reverie by a footstep close by, and looking up, beheld Gila Jack.

The darkly-handsome fellow appeared at his best this morning, and tipped his hat gracefully as he saw that Fan recognized him.

"Ah! good-morning, lady!" he saluted. "You are looking as charming as a wayside flower. Out for a stroll, I perceive?"

"Yes, I'm taking a little walk!" Fan replied, with a smile. "It's such a delightful morning, you know. Will you join me?"

"Most assuredly. Nothing will give me greater pleasure. I trust, lady, you will pardon me for the abrupt way in which I left you last evening, but—but—"

"But what?"

"We—we-I, you see, I recognized in that tall gentleman in the masquerading suit, an old-time friend, and as we had some confidential matters to arrange, he took up all the time, after I left you. I trust you did not feel offended at the abruptness of my departure."

"Oh! you were excusable, under the circumstances."

"I will try not to let the thing occur again. Isn't this delightful weather, Miss Fanny?"

"Splendiferous!" Fan assented, with apparent enthusiasm. "These balmy, dreamy days are very enchanting—almost seem as if they were born like love—to develop and perpetuate the finer sentiments of the human heart!"

"How lovely!" and Jack clasped his hands as if enraptured at her sentimental enthusiasm.

"Your words, do you know, Miss Fanny, but echo the emotion that rises within me! What a beautiful and sublime passion love is, to be sure."

"Oh! you bet!" Fan assented. "It just knocks poker higher'n a kite, and lays away over faro. Were you ever in love, Mr.—Mr.—?"

"Jack Denning is my name. Dear miss, I never knew the full meaning of the word love until you came before my vision; then, in an instant, I felt a sudden sensation tagging away at my heart-strings, and knew beyond a doubt that I was dead in love with you!"

"Oh! my!" and Fan hung her head and looked the pretty picture of confusion, as she toyed with a little switch she had picked up. "You don't mean it, Mr. Denning?"

"But I do, though, Fannie dear, and now that I have been frank with you, cannot you give me a little ray of hope that my affections have not been altogether misplaced—that you do like me, a little, and will be mine?"

He endeavored to encircle her waist with his arm, but she drew quickly away.

"Stop!" she said. "Don't get too fresh. I may like you, and all that, but allow no one such familiarity!"

"Oh! pardon me—pardon me for my presumption, but you know, really, I felt so happy that I forgot myself."

"All right; but see that you don't do it again. We Frisco gals don't allow the fellers to love, and kiss, an' hug us 'til we're yoked, an' we don't get yoked 'til we ketch on to a chap we like, an' we think is bed-rock good. Now, I don't mind admitting that I like you, but before I and you can strike a bargain, we've got to understand each other. D'ye see?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I suppose you've heard that I'm a detective?"

"Yes."

"Then you've heard aright. I make it my business to pry into other people's business, ferret out secrets, and bring crooked characters, in general, to justice. See?"

"Yes."

"Well, I had no sooner set eyes on you, than I placed you!"

"What?" Gila Jack gasped, turning pale; placed me?"

"The very same! I knew I had seen you before, or your face, and I set my thinking machine to working, and at last arrived at the ultimatum that your mug was a conspicuous ornament of the rogues gallery of Sacramento, while the police of Frisco are on the lookout for you, ready to nab you and land you back in State's Prison at sight."

Gila Jack had grown still whiter, and now paused and leaned up against a boulder as if he were unable to proceed further.

"This is terrible!" he gasped, covering his eyes for a moment with his hands. "I thought that accursed matter had all blown over and that I was safe from recognition. How did you find it out?"

"Oh! you are undoubtedly aware that a record is kept of all criminal cases, to which the detectives have access. In your case, however, I did not find out by the records. I have simply been imagining a case, and drew you on until you committed yourself!"

And here the girl detective gave herself up to a hearty fit of laughter, while Gila Jack uttered a smothered oath.

"Bah!" he said, a moment later. "I did not commit myself, at all. I was merely drawing you on, to see what sort of a game you were playing. If you want to know it, I am a detective, myself, and so, as we happen to be two of the same profession, I guess we had better shake!"

"I guess we had better postpone it until we get better acquainted," Fan replied. "It won't work, your trying to pass off as a detective. You committed yourself fairly and I would be doing no more than my duty if I put you under arrest."

"But you won't do it. Even though my past may have been dark, I am now leading an exemplary life, and I love you with my whole soul. Say that you will not expose me, but will, by becoming my wife, transform me into a better man. For your sweet sake, dearest Fannie, I will even join the ministry and convert sinners."

"You'd make a ripe old preacher!" Fan laughed. "Now, look here, Gila, I don't want to be hard on you, but if you want to stand any show in my estimation, you've got to make a clean breast of it!"

"A clean breast of what?"

"Why, of what racket you're up to, here, in Hoop-la. I don't deny that I'm somewhat stuck on you, and there is no tellin' but what we might make a hitch-up, after awhile. But before I make any rash promises, you've got to open your mouth, and give me some information. Then your chances will be better. Now, what are you doing here in Hoop-la?"

"Nothin' in particular; only keeping my eye out for a certain party!" Jack answered, hesitatingly.

"Ah! As I thought. You are paid to do this?"

"Yes—or was."

"Who was your employer?"

Jack hesitated, again.

"You want to know too much!" he said, suddenly. "I have no right to tell you."

"But, you must. In fact, I say you shall!"

And the girl detective's hand dropped to her revolver, significantly.

"You needn't take the trouble to draw that," Jack grumbled, "for, were I not disposed to tell you, that weapon would not scare me into doing it."

"Oh! wouldn't it?"

"Not a bit of it. I don't suppose there will be any harm of my telling you who hired me, as long as the party is dead. It was the Widow Wren."

"Exactly. I suspected that. When did she hire you?"

"Only a few weeks ago. I kept away from Hoop-la, until a couple of days ago."

"How long had you known the Widow, prior to being hired by her?"

"Not at all. I had just got out of—well, the penitentiary, and she found out about me, and sent for me."

"Whom did she send for you?"

"Hoss-Fly Hank."

"Where did your first meeting take place?"

"At the edge of this town."

"What did she want you to do?"

"She wanted me to hang around the neighborhood, and keep an outlook for a fellow, she expected would come here."

"His name was Richard Bristol—otherwise, Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

"Yes. How in the world did you know?"

"Never mind that. What were you to do, when you found him?"

"I do not choose to answer that question!"

"You were to murder him!" Fan cried, sternly. "You need not deny it! I can read it in your looks!"

Jack made no reply, but his jaws were set hard together, and it was plain he had no intention of making an admission, in that direction.

"Why did the Widow Wren want Deadwood Dick put out of the way?" Fan demanded, after a short pause.

"I know nothing about it."

"You never knew her, before she sent for you?"

"No—dead sure on that."

"Nor heard of her?"

"Never."

"What have you learned about her past, since you have been in her employ?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Do you know Doctor Lester?"

"I have seen him once or twice, but do not know anything about him."

"Did the Widow know him, before she employed his services?"

"I do not know."

"Do you think a child was born to the widow, at all?"

Gila Jack looked surprised.

"Why, I suppose so. Did not the doctor say so?"

"Yes. Doctors are not always truthful, you know. How much did the Widow pay you to hunt up Deadwood Dick, Junior, and put him out of the way?"

"I decline to talk upon the matter, at all. I will answer your other questions, as well as I can, but not those relative to any bargain I may have made with the Widow."

"Do you propose to still continue your search for this Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

"No, I don't."

"Who is that nondescript individual, who calls himself Hoss-Fly Hank?"

"Oh! he is an odd chap I met several years ago, up in Calaveras county. Used to steal horses, but he has taken to mining, now."

"Where?"

"Up in the mountains, about ten miles from here."

"You lie!" Fan cried, pointedly. "That man is one of the Widow's tools, and the guard over an important secret. And, I'll find him, before long. You may stay here, now. Be here to-night and I'll come again, and we will take a stroll together, during which perhaps, we may drop in at the minister's. Ta! ta!" And throwing a kiss at him, Flush Fan hurried back toward Hoop-la!

CHAPTER XII.

NURSE GANNON'S UNWELCOME VISITOR.

WHEN Flush Fan got back into the mining-camp she did not enter the hotel, but kept on toward the ruins of the cabin on the Berwyn Claim, near which the Henderson party were still gathered.

As she passed the hotel, however, she heard the sound of loud voices in the Cafe Clarice, intermingled with the clinking of glasses, and concluded that the miners were drinking freely.

Fan did not go direct to where Mohave and his party were gathered, but stopped first at the cabin of Susan Wolf, where she was welcomed received.

"I am so glad you have come, for I have been so worried," Susan said. "The miners have been having a fight, and now appear to be divided into two parties, and I am afraid there is going to be serious trouble."

"Oh! not necessarily so, I guess!" Fan replied, encouragingly. "I suppose you have heard about the bulletin of Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

"Yes. Mohave was over here since the fight, and told me all about it. Mohave and I are engaged, you see, and he's a very nice fellow, only a little wild and reckless. He believes that little Bessie, here"—pointing to the child, who sat upon the floor nursing her doll—"is really the child of the dwarf, Boyd Berwyn, and the miners who recognize Mohave as a sort of a leader think as he does."

"I haven't much doubt but what they are correct," Fan replied, "and before another fortnight passes I hope to prove it. There is one thing I am pretty positive of, however."

"And that—"

"Is, that the babe at the hotel was never born in this camp!"

"My! you don't say so!"

"But, I do though; and, more than that, there is not a doubt in my mind but what the widow was a bad, bad woman—in fact, I know she was. But, whether she was ever connected by marriage with Boyd Berwyn or not, is more than I know. But, leave it to me to find out. Has the child been contented here?"

"Oh! yes, and I am becoming quite attached to it. I raised its eyelids this morning and bathed its eyes, and I really have hopes that its sight may yet be restored, as the pupil does not appear to be destroyed, while the ball itself is not very badly inflamed. It is very sore, however, and that is the reason, I think, why she keeps her lids closed."

"Dear knows, I hope so!" and Fan raised

Bessie to her feet, in front of her. "Don't you know your name, little one?"

"Me name Bessie," was the innocent reply. "Me dot a dolly but tan't see it. Do dolly look pretty?"

"Very, very pretty, dear! Was your papa's name Boyd Berwyn?"

"Me don't know. Me fordot. Me like you."

"Do you? Well, that is nice," and Fannie kissed the little waif upon her cherry lips. "Be a good little girl now, and I will try and find your papa."

"But, me tan't see my papa. Bessie tan't see no more!"

"Perhaps you can see after a while, dear. Be patient and let aunty wash your eyes when she wants to, and perhaps your sight will be restored to you, through God's mercy," and tears were in Fannie's eyes.

She then sat the poor little thing down on the floor again, with its doll, and arose to go.

"I shall be so glad to have you come again," Susan said, following her to the door. "I hope, too, that there will be no more trouble among the mines."

"There's likely to be, I presume, sooner or later, but I shall advise your lover and his party to stick for the rights of Little Bess, and they shall lose nothing by it, if I have to pay them out of my own pocket. Above all, do not surrender Bess to Doctor Lester."

Fannie then left the cabin, and went over to the miners at the deserted hut.

They were grim, and in a bad humor, but her coming brightened them up, perceptibly, and she was received warmly.

"We're glad you've come!" Mohave said, "for we were gettin' afeard you had gone over to the other side, ye see."

"Not a bit of it!" Fan replied. "I know too much of what's right, for that, and I am glad to find you have taken the stand. For, let me add to your belief, my assurance that Little Bess is, undoubtedly, Boyd Berwyn's own child; and, if Berwyn is dead, she is his heir. Therefore, you are right in standing up for the blind girl, as the child up at the hotel is not, nor never was a Berwyn, nor is it the child of the designing woman who was known here as the Widow. I tell you this, as a detective, and in due time will explain more, that will no doubt astonish you."

"So stand firm, and unless the others yield, let not a pick be struck in this soil!"

"You bet we won't!" Mohave responded, with resolve in his voice. "I allus take sides purty nigh right. Ther boyees, heer, do ther same, an' as we've made up our minds that Blind Bess air ther real heir, an' ther other kid has been produced ter cheat Bess out o' her rights, we're goin' ter stand by the blind gal till thar's nary strength enough left in our legs to stand. Eh! boyees?"

The men gave a grunt of assent, their grim-expressed faces answering better than words what they were prepared to do.

After a few more words of encouragement, Flush Fan took her departure, and returned to the hotel.

"If I can work matters all right, the result of to-night's labors will about wind up my work in Hoop-la!" she mused.

By which, it was evident that she meant to make some rapid and astonishing developments. For a town of Hoop-la's size, the Windsor Hotel was a wonderfully roomy building.

The second floor, in particular, abounded with wide hallways, and spacious rooms, all of which were nicely carpeted, and furnished.

One thing was certain: The Widow had spared no expense in fixing a comfortable hostelry—something the place would never have had, in all probability, but for her.

Flush Fan at once retired to her own room, but remained there only a few minutes, when she left it, walked along the hall, and rapped at the door of another room.

After several minutes' delay this door was opened just a crack, and a voice, unmistakably that of a woman, demanded:

"Well, what's wanted?"

Fan's only reply was to push her whole weight against the door, and crowd into the room, where she found herself in the presence of a thin, consumptive-looking woman of middle age, and shabbily attired.

Withal, she was not one whose face betrayed any particular badness in her nature—rather, she seemed to be a person whom one might suspect of having seen better days.

She uttered a slight scream as Flush Fan crowded into the room, but Fan quickly caught hold of her, hurled her away from the door, and closed it and slid the bolt.

Then she drew her revolver and said:

"Now, then, madam, not so much as a trill out of you, or I'll send you before the Judge of the Eternal Grand Jury quicker'n a cat ever clim' a fence!"

The woman looked nearly frightened out of her wits at sight of the revolver.

"Who are you?" she gasped. "What do you mean by intruding here?"

"I came here on a righteous errand, and if you keep quiet, and attempt to raise no alarm, no harm will come to you. But, if you make an attempt to play me foul, I'll shoot you dead! Now, remember!"

"Yes'm."

"My name is Flush Fan, and I'm a detective. I came here to seek information. What is your name?"

"Gertrude, ma'am."

"Gertrude what?"

"Gannon, ma'am—Gertrude Gannon."

"Who employs you?"

"Doctor Lester, ma'am."

"How long has he employed you?"

"Only since the lady was sick."

"Where do you belong?"

"In Cojeta, ma'am."

"Cojeta, eh? How long have you known the doctor?"

Gertrude appeared to be growing fidgety.

"About two years," she finally managed to articulate.

"Were you present when Mrs. Wren's baby was born?"

"Yes'm."

"Were you present when Mrs. Wren died?"

"Yes'm."

"Did you hear her tell the doctor that she had been the divorced wife of one Boyd Berwyn?"

"Yes'm."

"Did she make a will, and appoint the doctor as administrator?"

"Yes'm."

"You witnessed it, I suppose?"

"Yes'm."

"Who has the will?"

"The doctor has it."

"Did you help to lay Mrs. Wren out, in the coffin?"

"Yes'm."

"Before dying, did she state that she wanted not to be seen by the people of the town, after death?"

"She did."

"Where is the child?"

Gertrude again hesitated.

"I have orders to let no one see the baby," she said, anxiously.

"That's nothing to me!" Fan returned, sternly. "Show me the child, or I'll put you where the Widow is!"

This proved effectual, for Gertrude led the way toward a curtained alcove, and drew aside the curtains, thereby revealing a bed beyond.

Nestling among the pillows upon this bed was the same chubby boy baby whom the Widow had introduced to the people of Whoop-la, from the hotel piazza.

It was wide awake, and crowing softly to itself, as it tried to cram its little fist into its mouth—a pretty little chunk of humanity, looking far older than fourteen days, which supposedly was its age.

Flush Fan gazed at it a moment, and then, with a strange cry, sprung forward, seized the infant in her arms, and covered its face with burning kisses.

Then she suddenly laid it down again, as if alarmed at what she had done, and turned to Gertrude.

"How old is it?"

"Fifteen days, ma'am."

"Pshaw! That child is two months old if a day!"

"No, indeed, it's not, ma'am!"

"What's its name?"

"Prosper."

"Humph. It's a boy, eh?"

"Yes'm."

"Pull up the sleeve on its left arm, above the elbow!"

"Oh! ma'am, sure and I dassn't do that. The doctor said as the least exposure of the child's arms would give it cold. It is such a wee bit of a thing yet, you know!"

"I'll risk its takin' cold!" Fan retorted, pulling back the hammer of the revolver she held. "Are you going to pull up the sleeve, or do you want me to give you a free meal on cold lead?"

With something like to a groan, the nurse went forward and pulled the right arm sleeve of the infant up to the elbow.

Flush Fan then stepped forward and examined the arm.

Upon it, just below the elbow, was a small crimson mark upon the flesh, no larger than a nickel, and crescent-shaped—a veritable crimson crescent.

It was evidently not a birth-mark, but had been pricked into the skin with ink, by the tattooing process.

Fan regarded it a moment, then said, abruptly:

"That's all. I am going now. If I ever hear that you breathe a word about my visit here, or what has occurred, you will have the pleasure of spending the remainder of your days in prison. Remember!"

Then she turned to depart, but too late.

A footstep sounded in the hall outside.

Gertrude turned deathly pale.

"It's the doctor!" she gasped. "Oh! for God's sake, hide quick. He will kill me if he finds you here!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRAIL OF BLOOD.

JUST what to do under the circumstances was something that puzzled Flush Fan exceedingly, for there was no way of escape from the room except by the door, outside of which the footstep had sounded.

Doctor Lester was coming, and would no doubt enter the room.

She must not be seen by him, or perhaps all her plans for the future would be spoiled.

She gave a quick glance around, and parting the curtains, crept in under the bed, upon which lay the baby.

And not a moment too soon, either, for she heard the door tried, and Gertrude hastened to open it.

Then the doctor entered.

"Well, how are things?" he demanded. "Has any one been bothering you to see the baby?"

"N-no, sir," Gertrude replied.

"Is the kid troublesome?"

"No, sir, not in the least."

"Well, that's good for you. Follow instructions, and admit no one to the room but myself, and all will be well. I'll drop in later in the day."

And much to Flush Fan's relief, he took his departure, and she was free to crawl from her hiding-place.

"Lucky for me he didn't make a long stay," she observed, brushing herself off, "and I'll git, before he returns. But, mind you, Gannon, if you ever mention a word about my being here, to him or to any one else, I will make it the sorriest day of your life, you can bet!"

"You need not fear," the nurse replied. "I would not dare let the doctor know that I admitted you to this room."

"Because you are guarding his secret, eh? Ha! ha! It will do him no good, all this scheming. I'll beat him at his own game. And as for your lies, I hope you get paid so well for them that your conscience will never give you an accusing kick."

"I—I—"

"Tut! tut! You need not say you do not understand me, or that you haven't told any lies, for you know whose child that is on yonder bed. But I have no time to bandy words with you. Remember my warning, and heed it!"

With this parting injunction, she left the room.

She went directly down-stairs, but instead of going into the bar-room, left the hotel by the hall-door, and went out about the gulch.

For fully an hour she sauntered about here and there, and appeared to be in a deep reverie.

Occasionally she would halt and consult her memorandum-book; then she would go on again without confining her course to any particular direction.

At last she paused, with a start.

Before her, upon the ground, lay a partly-dried pool of clotted blood!

From this spot a trail of blood-drops led toward a narrow, dark chasm, that branched off the main gulch just opposite the town.

"Ha! What means this?" the girl detective cried. "Some person, or animal, has been killed or wounded here, and it looks like human blood. Has murder been done here, and if so, who was the victim? I've heard no report of any of the townspeople being missing. Ha!"

She had followed the trail a few paces, and now stooped and picked up a bloody knife, with which the murderous deed had no doubt been committed.

It was an ordinary blade, with a horn handle.

"There seems no room for doubt!" Fan commented, "but what some person has been seri-

ously wounded, and this trail of blood seems to point in the direction in which the man staggered off, or else, was carried. I've nothing particular to do just at present, so I will follow this trail as far as it leads, and see what I shall see."

Wrapping the knife in a piece of paper drawn from her pocket, she set out on the trail.

Mohave Henderson and several others about town noticed her going toward the ravine, but thought nothing of it.

In the mean time two persons were holding a consultation at one of the obscure tables in the Cafe Clarice, and the reader will recognize them respectively as Doctor Lester, and Milton Manning.

The doctor had been speaking earnestly, emphasizing his words, frequently, with gestures of a rather dramatic character.

"You will see that it will pay you not to be a clam!" he said, finally, in winding up. "There's a chance for you to make, or to break, so now which are you going to do?"

"Waal, I don't know," Manning replied, in rather a dogged manner. "I war always brought up pretty fair and square, and it wouldn't accord with my past life, to do as you have proposed."

"Bah! What does all that amount to? Nothing at all! You know that scrupulous men very seldom get rich, nowadays. Why, just look at it. Here you've been delving away in the mines for there's no telling how long, and I don't believe you've got a thousand dollars saved up to show for it."

"No, I haven't," Milt acknowledged, "but I would have had if I hadn't flashed away so much over the gaming-table."

"Just so. And now, simply by the turning of your hand, you can make more all at once, than in all these years you have with the pick and pan. Five thousand dollars isn't picked up every day."

"I know it ain't," was the reply, "but, hang me if I like the idea of killin' a feller, just for that sum. Mebbe it is true that he is an outlaw, but he's a human all the same, an' murder is murder, the best way you can make it!"

"Pshaw! What of that?"

"Why don't you do it, yourself?"

"Because I would be the first to be suspected, as it is known I am a sworn enemy of this so-called Deadwood Dick Junior. You, on the contrary, would naturally be the last man to be suspected of the job, so are the very one to do it. Once this Deadwood Dick Junior is out of the way we shall experience no more trouble about the mine."

"Why not? The blind child will still remain?"

"Oh! I'll attend to her case, never fear! She shall be spirited away, and once she is gone, the trouble with Mohave's gang will be at an end!"

They conversed for some time longer, Milt Manning appearing to be an unwelcome listener to what was said.

He finally arose, however, his face rather sullen and disagreeable of expression.

"Well," he said, "I will think the matter over, between now and night, and let you know. It aire purty likely I shall accept yer offer, for, as you say, five thousand dollars ain't picked up every day. But the question is, am I sure of getting it—the money—if I do the job?"

"Positively sure!" the doctor assured. "I would not deceive you, for that would not be business. I want this Deadwood Dick out of my way, and, what's more, he must be put out of my way at once."

"Very well!" and the miner strode away toward the bar.

While the doctor rubbed his hands softly together and smiled.

"Good!" he commented. "I've worked him fine. I had no idea I could get him under my control so easily, he is naturally such an honest sort of fellow. But, the offer of five thousand dollars was too much for his fine sense of honor, and I think I can count on him as mine. Ha! once that infernal sleuth-hound, Deadwood Dick, Junior is out of my way, I shall feel safer!"

CHAPTER XIV.

JACK MEETS HIS MAN.

ALL day long Mohave and his men lingered about the Boyd Berwyn claim, and just at sunset it was perceived that they had erected a tent, and were making preparations to camp down upon the spot.

This literally made Doc Lester and his men boiling mad, but their fury knew no bounds when a spy of theirs informed them that Mohave and his men were not only well supplied with rifles

and other weapons, but the wily leader of the band had come a neat little stratagem by buying up all the cartridges, and other ammunition in the town.

During the day, Doc Lester caused a notice to be posted in conspicuous places, offering a reward of one thousand dollars for the capture of Deadwood Dick, Junior, dead or alive.

But this notice did not realize the doctor's expectation of drawing some of Mohave's men over to his, the doctor's, side.

The men who stood by the Cojeta, rascal held several meetings during the day, to decide whether it would be best to attack Mohave's party in a warlike manner, but, up to the falling of darkness, no arrangements had been made for such an attack.

There was one person who watched the oncoming of night with more than usual eagerness.

This, of course, was Gila Jack.

To-night he was to meet his charming Fannie, he told himself, over and over again, and she had as good as assured him that she would become his bride before the night was over.

If such a thing should transpire, he was positive that he would be the happiest man in seven States.

He really was in love with the fair detective, and all the more so since she had let him know that she knew what sort of a character he was, and yet was not particularly averse to taking him as her better half.

So, by the time it was fairly dusk, he had stationed himself at the point where she had left him that morning, to await her coming.

He had added a few finishing touches to his dress, including a pretty button-hole bouquet, and really was good-looking enough to make a "mash" upon almost any susceptible lady.

And for what he believed to be his nuptial eve, the night was most beautiful, with a soft balmy breeze stirring the foliage, and the big, round moon looking smilingly down into the rugged gulch.

On reaching the spot where he and Flush Fan had parted, Gila Jack hoisted himself to a seat upon a large boulder to await the coming of his *inamorata*.

"What a beautiful night!" he mused. "Everything seems auspicious for the consummation of my heart's fondest hope. Fannie will be here soon, and then we will hasten to the minister's and have the knot tied which makes her mine. Then I will carry out my contract with the captain, providing I can find my man, after which, with my pockets well-lined with money, I will seek some other and safer place of residence. I've an idea Fannie is pretty well heeled, too. Anyhow, her diamonds are worth a small fortune, I should presume.

"The matter that sticks me most is, how am I going to find and get away with that confounded cuss, Deadwood Dick, Junior? I never saw him in my life, and all I've got to go by is by the description I got from the doctor."

"Finding Deadwood Dick is one thing, and getting away with him is another!"

Gila Jack looked around with a quick start, and saw a man standing a few paces in his rear.

The man was clad in black, the upper portion of his face covered by a black mask.

Deadwood Dick, Jr., it indeed was, clasping a revolver in his right hand.

"Great Jehosaphat!" Gila Jack gasped, nearly tumbling off the rock, so greatly was he startled. "Who are you?"

"Deadwood Dick, Junior, at your service!" was the reply—"the 'confounded cuss' you were making reference to a moment ago."

"You Deadwood Dick?" Jack gasped, feeling a chill of terror creeping over him.

"Yes, Deadwood Dick," the detective avenger replied, "and from the remarks I just overheard and some previous hints I have received, I conclude you want to see me!"

"No! no! It's a mistake!" Jack stammered, seeing that Dick had the drop. "It is not you I want to see."

"Ah! Is that so? Well, Gila, you are the chap I want to see! Get down off that rock."

Fairly trembling in his boots, Gila Jack obeyed.

"Oh! you have surely made a mistake!" he cried cringingly. "I am not the person—I do not even know you."

"You'll be pretty well acquainted with me before I'm through with you!" Dick laughed. "You see, I know all about you, young man. You were hired by the Widow Wren to hunt me down and murder me. Later, Doctor Lester assumed the responsibility of becoming your employer. Do not attempt to deny it or I'll put

a lead pill through your cocoanut as a truth-suggester."

Gila Jack made no reply, but stood white and trembling before his accuser, expecting every instant that he would be shot down.

Seeing that Jack made no effort to speak, Dick went on:

"I've got you down fine, Gila Jack, and but for one or two things I would kill you where you stand, for you would have murdered me if you had caught me unawares. I've a mind to shoot you as it is!"—this with sudden fierceness.

"For God's sake! don't kill me!" Jack cried, dropping upon his knees, with his hands clasped appealingly. "I beg and implore of you to have mercy upon me."

"Get up, you fool!" Dick ordered. "You deserve to be riddled for your cowardice, if for nothing else. How do you suppose your *inamorata*, Flush Fan, would look upon you to see you groveling in the dust? Get up, I say!"

Jack obeyed.

"Now, then, you keep your ears open, and I'll tell you what is what!" Dick said sternly. "I've got it in for you. The life of a man of your stamp is no more in my estimation than that of the vilest reptile that creeps or walks."

"I should not have wasted all of this time on you, only that I can make you serve my purpose. If you serve that purpose to my satisfaction, you go free, with your life. If you don't, I'll kill you anyhow, and leave your bones to bleach on the mountains. D'ye comprehend me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Now, if you want to live, answer my questions truthfully. Do you know where Boyd Berwyn is?"

Jack shook his head.

"I do not," he replied with apparent candor.

"Do you know whether he is alive, or not?"

"No. I never heard of such a man until I heard about the claim."

"You knew a man called Hoss-Fly Hank?"

"Yes, slightly."

"You know where his hang-out is?—where he usually stays?"

"Yes, it is about three miles from here, up in the mountains."

"You told Flush Fan a greater distance than that!"

Gila Jack started.

"Maybe I did," he admitted. "Do you know Flush Fan?"

"Oh! presumably!" Dick replied, with a laugh. "What sort of a place is Hoss-Fly Hank's abode?"

"A cave."

"Ah! Hoss-Fly Hank was in the employ of the Widow Wren, was he not?"

"I believe so."

"You know so?"

"Well, yes."

"What was Hank to do for the charming Widow?—keep guard over a prisoner, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Is he still doing the same?"

"For all that I know, he is."

"You knew Hank, before he and you came to Arizona?"

Gila Jack hesitated.

"See here, am I to go Scot free, for answering all these questions?" he demanded.

"Yes, if you answer them straight. If I detect you at trying to lie to me, off goes your head!"

"Go on, then."

"Answer my last question!"

"Yes, I knew Hank before I came to Arizona. He belonged in Frisco, and made his living by burglary."

"I thought so. Did you ever see the prisoner up in the cave?"

"Yes."

"Is he not a dwarf, and homely?"

"He is. They keep him chained—leastwise I mean Hank does. He is the only one that goes there."

"Does Dr. Lester continue to pay you and Hank?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Now, then, you have but one more thing to do, and then I am done with you, and you can go and marry Flush Fan, if you like."

"What is it?"

"Guide me to that cave, and assist me to capture Hoss-Fly Hank and release the prisoner!"

"And for doing this, you will allow me to go free, and make no charge against me?"

"Exactly!"

Gila Jack's eyes glistened.

"Then, I'm your man," he cried, quickly.

CHAPTER XV.

TO THE RESCUE.

DEADWOOD DICK, JUNIOR, while speaking to and questioning Gila Jack, had studied the fellow carefully, to see if there was any treachery in his apparent humbleness and submission, but, sharp-eyed though he was, he could detect none.

To all intents, Jack was so well satisfied with the prospect of escaping with his life, that he was willing to agree to almost anything.

And so Dick came to the conclusion that he could trust him.

"Very well. We will start at once, for having other work to do to-night, I have no time to lose. Give me your weapons, and then lead off!" ordered Dick.

Jack surrendered a pair of pocket-revolvers and a large clasp-knife, and then announcing his readiness, led the way.

Deadwood Dick, Junior, brought up the rear. The route lay down the gulch for about a mile, then they entered a sort of time-beaten bear-trail, that ran slantwise up the mountain-side.

This they followed as fast as the rugged nature of the path would permit, pausing only twice in the ascent, to catch their breath.

At last, just below an out-jutting ledge, Gila Jack came to a halt, and motioned Dick to do likewise.

"The cave opens out upon the ledge above," Jack explained, "and we shall have to go mighty careful, for Hank may be awake, and out on the ledge. Perhaps I had better go ahead, and draw Hank into conversation. After a few minutes you can steal up, and get the drop on him. What do you say to that?"

Dick eyed his man a moment sharply.

"Do you mean to try and play me into a trap?" he demanded.

"By no means. I know on which side my bread is buttered, you bet!"

"Very well—sail ahead! But, mind you, if you try to play me false, I'll hunt you around the world but what I get square with you."

"I am not going to make it necessary for you to do that. Keep shady here for about ten minutes, then come along as quiet as a mouse. The moment you get a good sight of Hoss-Fly, cover him with your revolvers, and order him to throw up his hands. He's a pretty game chap, but I reckon we ought to do him up easy enough."

Dick nodded, and Jack went cautiously on along the bush-hedged trail, and was lost to view.

Dick at once carefully cocked and examined his revolvers, for, despite the fact that he was under the impression that Jack meant to act square, he knew it would be well enough to look out for an emergency.

After waiting the ten minutes, and hearing no sound from the plateau above, he made up his mind to proceed, and so stole stealthily along the trail, which wound onward and upward and finally brought him out upon a level ledge or shelving of rock, some ten by twelve feet in size, at one side of which the mountain-wall rolled upward.

In this cold, gray wall of rock there was a large hole, which led into what most likely some day had been a bear pit.

There was no one out upon the ledge, upon which the moon shone down clearly.

"They must be in the pit!" Dick muttered, "and a nice looking den it is to trap a feller in!"

He crept along to one side of the hole and listened, but could hear no voices.

This at once aroused his suspicions.

Had Gila Jack proven traitor to him, after all?

Ha! what was this?

He heard footsteps, and they were coming out of the cave too.

Not the footsteps of one man, but of two, or more.

Was it Jack and Hoss-Fly Hank?

Deadwood Dick drew the hammers of his revolvers back to full cock, fully resolved what he would do, if it should prove that Jack was playing traitor.

An instant later two men came out of the cave into the moonlight.

Sure enough, it was Gila Jack, but his companion, whom he partly supported, was not Hoss-Fly Hank.

Instead, as Dick became satisfied at a glance, it was Boyd Berwyn, the dwarf—an old man with furrowed countenance and sunken eyes—with long white hair and beard, tangled and matted together—with a short muscular figure, scarcely four-and-a-half feet in height, which was

rendered more unsightly by a painful hump upon his back.

There was nothing positively repulsive about his face, as Dick could see, although he could not be called handsome; and he was quite decently attired.

He walked with an effort, however, and appeared very weak.

Dick at once sprang forward, and made his presence known.

"Gila Jack, you are a trump!" he said. "You have kept your word. You are free now, to go whither you will, so far as I am concerned. But where did you leave Hoss-Fly Hank?"

"In there," Jack replied significantly, pointing over his shoulder. "He smelt a rat when I entered the cave, and tried to knife me, but I took the knife away from him and used it myself. Then I liberated the prisoner, and here we are."

"I am glad you have proven yourself square, and if I run across you in Hoop-la, when you are in trouble, you may depend upon it I will help you out. If you desire to get back to camp, you need wait no longer on my account, as I will take good care of the old man."

"Very well. I think I will get back, as I have an appointment yet to keep this evening."

"All right. Success to you!"

So Gila Jack took his departure, Dick watching him leave, with a faint smile.

He then induced the dwarf to sit down, and gave him a drink of liquor out of a flask he had purposely brought with him.

"Now, old gent, take a short rest, until the liquor revives you; then we will go where you can get something to eat, for I judge by your weakness that you have not been overfed."

"No, I have had very little to eat in the last week," the dwarf replied in a husky tone.

"Who are you, sir—for your voice has a kindly tone?"

"My name is Dick Bristol, though I bear the name of Deadwood Dick, Junior, wherever I go."

"Then, are you an enemy, or a friend?"

"A friend, to be sure, old hearty, or else why should I have planned your liberation? Your name is Boyd Berwyn, is it not?"

"Yes, yes; but how did you guess it? What do you know about me?"

"Not so much as I want to. I want to hear your story, and then, I will tell you mine, and then you will understand how it chances that we have thus been thrown together."

"I am not very strong, but think, with another pull at your bottle, I shall be able to summon strength enough to tell you!" the dwarf said, slowly. "It isn't a very pleasant story, but when I think of it, it makes me feel strong—strong to live, and strong to strike for revenge!"

Eager to hear his recital, Dick gave him another swallow of the whisky, after which the old man appeared to brace up, perceptibly.

"Well, now, listen, and I will tell you all about it!" he said.

CHAPTER XVI.

BOYD BERWYN'S STORY—AND DICK'S.

"I AM getting to be a pretty old man," Boyd Berwyn began, "and nearly all my life has been in the West, although I originally came from old Vermont, where I was born of one of the best families."

"I have followed up the various scenes and adventures of Western life for forty years, and have had many thrilling experiences—enough to fill volumes, I presume—but it was left until old age began to creep upon me, to have the most telling experience of my life."

"A little over five years ago I met and married an humble miner's daughter, named Florette Davidson; one of the sweetest and most affectionate women that ever breathed the breath of life."

"I had always been a saving man, and had amassed quite a snug little fortune. After we were married we settled down in San Francisco, with no one but ourselves to make happy, and ourselves alone to enjoy the advantages of the wealth I possessed. Florette knew nothing of my wealth when I married her, but took me because she liked me, deformed and ill-favored in looks though I was."

"Well, married life seemed to prosper me, and every business venture I touched seemed to turn into money at a rapid rate, and I finally became notably rich."

"About a year and a half after our marriage, however, a cloud came over me. A little baby-girl was born to me, but alas! my wife then

died, and all the world seemed dark to me. The babe was my only hope and comfort, and I fairly worshiped it."

"It wasn't long after Florette's death that I grew tired of city life, and resolved to seek some quiet, solitary abode, where I could spend my few remaining years in peace, and rear my child in the way I would have it go."

"Before leaving Frisco, however, I was introduced to a beautiful and designing young woman—a mere child, you might say—who played her best cards to catch me for a husband. But I was not to be caught, and when I finally left Frisco, I never expected to see her again."

"Her name?" queried Deadwood Dick.

"Was Marion Wren. Well, I had purchased a small ranch near Benson, in Arizona, and thither, with my baby daughter, I went to live. I had a comfortable place, and was getting along nicely, and a year passed by."

"Then the devil came along, in the shape of Marion Wren. She claimed to be homeless and friendless, and asked for work, and, as a result, I made her my housekeeper, and nurse over my child."

"Well, she left me for a visit to Frisco occasionally, but always returned punctually, and never lost an opportunity to make a favorable impression on me. To all intents, she was a veritable angel in human form."

"Finally, about a year ago, I married her. Good God! how often I have wished I had been struck down before I ever was permitted to make her my wife. For the wedding day had scarcely passed, ere she began to show the devil in her nature. Why, sir, she turned out to be a very she-demon!"

"I can well believe that!" Dick said, bitterly.

"And why? Do you know her?"

"Yes. But go on."

"Well, she abused me and my child shamefully, told us openly that she hated us, and wished us dead—in fact, raised a very hell on earth, until my home became really a spot of horror to me. Why, sir, you have no idea what a villainous-tempered virago she was, and sometimes I really stood in fear of my life."

"Finally, however, I asserted my rights as master of my own home; I cleared her out, and warned her never to return. She swore she would have a deadly revenge on me, and that's the last I saw of her until very recently, when she came back, tearful and very penitent, apparently, and asked to be taken in. My heart relented, and I took her in."

"She had been back only a few days when she demanded to know where I kept my money."

"This was a secret I had never imparted to her, although I had always liberally supplied her with means. I refused to tell where I kept it; whereupon she flew into a rage, and began her abuse again, and we had it hot and heavy."

"One day the climax came. She flew into a passion at something my child did, and threw some sort of powder into its eyes that blinded it; then, sir, she turned upon me, and shot me down, and I knew no more until I found myself a manacled prisoner in yonder cave."

Here the dwarf broke down, with emotion, and wept.

"Cheer up!" Dick said, comfortingly. "Do not give way to grief, for matters may come around right, yet. Remember, sir, that we both have a bitter revenge to seek upon this woman, or rather, this she demon, for she is nothing else."

"Both! both you say? And why should you be revenged upon her?"

"For a good and sufficient reason. She has done me even a greater wrong than yourself!"

"Explain what, pray, but—no! no!—tell me first of my child—do you know anything of my child?"

"Yes, your child is well and safe, in Hoop-la, only about two miles from here. But, most unfortunately, she is blind."

"Oh! my God!" escaped the agonized parent's lips, and then he utterly broke down, and sobbed as though his heart would break.

It was some minutes ere Dick could get him quiet, so as to go on with what he had to say.

Then, he began:

"Comparatively a few weeks ago, before I thought of coming here, I was journeying down to Tombstone, by stage-coach. With me were my newly-made wife, California Kit, and our babe—not our own, understand, but a few days' old youngster we had adopted from a widow in Tucson, who was dying."

"On the coach we got acquainted with a beautiful young lady, who gave the name of Ada Almer, and who I noticed took a decided fancy to myself, a fact that caused my young wife, naturally, to become a little jealous:

"Well, on our arrival at Tombstone, I bought a shanty and some furniture, with all possible dispatch, and my wife and I moved in, and went at once to housekeeping."

"The next day, Miss Almer applied to my wife, for board, but was refused. I met her several times, on the street, and she would intercept me and draw me into conversation, and finally, one day, she told me outright that she loved me, and had set her heart on having me, and proposed that I leave my wife and elope with her."

"Of course I promptly scorned the proposition, and told her that then and there our acquaintance must cease. At this she grew very angry and swore she would have revenge upon me for insulting her, and scorning her love. But of course, I thought little of it."

"Just previous to coming to Tombstone, I received an appointment, by the California authorities, as special detective in this Territory, to look up California criminals. Among other cases that were placed before me, was that of one Marion Elmore, alias Marion Wren, alias Morris Brant, alias Jim Glenn, alias Addie Archbold, a notorious safe-robber, forger and criminal-at-large, of the Golden State. As no photo came with it, I had little hopes of locating the party."

"My shanty was somewhat isolated from town, so that I never heard the latest news, until I went into the town, in the morning."

"The morning after my encounter with Ada Almer, I heard that she had been caught breaking in a room, at the hotel, where she stopped."

"As the hearing was to come off at ten o'clock and I wanted to be present, I hurried to the post-office to see if there was any mail for me. There was, and it was a letter from Frisco, inclosing a photograph of the wanted Addie Archbold, who, the letter informed me, might be going the rounds under the alias of Ada Almer."

"Well, you can bet I was present at that hearing, and, as a result of my explanation and proofs, the fair Ada was remanded to jail to await the action of the California authorities, in whose favor the hotel proprietor withdrew his charge."

"Ada was furious at me, as you may well imagine, but I dismissed her from my thoughts, as I considered her secure from doing any one any harm."

"On the morning of the following day, I kissed my wife and babe good-by, and went into town as usual to attend to business."

"Imagine my surprise, on arriving there, to learn that the dashing Ada had broken jail during the night, and made good her escape. At first it was only surprise that assailed me, but it was not long ere a feeling of uneasiness came over me, and, mounting my horse, I set out in hot haste for my shanty."

"On my arrival there I found my worst fears confirmed. Upon the floor, cold in death, lay my beautiful young wife with a dagger in her heart. A paper pinned to her dress bore the words, 'Vengeance of Morris Brant!' that was all. Of our adopted child, I could find nothing."

"Well, as you may suppose, I swore a terrible oath of vengeance, and set out upon the trail of the beautiful demon who had been the cause of all my sorrow. I finally struck it, and sought for her at the house of Boyd Berwyn, near Benson. I arrived there to find the house in smoking ruins. I made inquiries, but from the half-Mexican neighbors could gain little or no information, more than that the dwelling had burned down, and nothing was known of its former inhabitants."

"But, by what little I picked up, I formed the conclusion that Ada Almer had been there, so I took the trail, and by strategy, finally succeeded in locating her in Hoop-la!"

"In Hoop-la?"

"Ay, even as I tell you. I found her there, and in a dead faint. She was at my mercy. I could have killed her, but I did not wish to, just then."

"Why not?"

"Because I wanted to find out *your* fate, and if she had murdered you, place another crime on her head!"

Dick then went on and told about how the Widow had prospered and schemed in Hoop-la, how Little Bess had arrived, and many other things well known to the reader.

The two avengers spent some time, then, in consultation, after which, they set out in the direction of Hoop-la, Dick assisting the dwarf along, for he was yet too weak to walk steadily.

And there was something in the clear glance of the moon that seemed meant for the two-wronged wayfarers—to light them upon the path to a victory!

CHAPTER XVII.

FLUSH FAN'S ENTERTAINMENT—CONCLUSION.
It was after ten o'clock that night when Flush Fan was seen in the Cafe Clarice, and then it was only for a few minutes.

She set the drinks up for the crowd and called Gila Jack outside, for Gila Jack, growing tired of spooning alone in the moonlight down the gulch, had returned to the camp in no enviable frame of mind, with the full determination to avenge himself by getting full of fluid lightning; but about the time he reached the *cafe* it chanced that Flush Fan reached there, too.

"Well, what do you want?" Jack demanded, sullenly.

"Oh! I want you," Fan laughed. "What are you looking so grum about?"

"You didn't keep your appointment," Jack growled. "I waited for you down the gulch until I got sick of it."

"Sorry, but I've been so chock-full of business that I had no time to play lover. Where's the doctor?"

"I don't know."

"Has he been in the bar?"

"Not since I've been there."

"He's probably up-stairs, then. Now, look here, Gila, do you mean business? Do you really want to marry me?"

"Do I?" gasped Jack. "Well, I should remark! I shouldn't have asked you if I hadn't meant business. Of course I want to marry you, Fanny dear, and I'll make you a good husband."

"Well, then, you look a-her. There's a little simple job I want you to do for me, to help me wind up my business here, and after I'm through, if you really want to marry me, marry it is!"

"Correct! Name the job and I'm your huckleberry, you can bet!"

"Very well. Exactly one hour from now you are to hunt up the doctor, wherever he is, and tell him that a wedding is about to take place in the parlor of the hotel, and that he is wanted to give the bride away. If he refuses to come, you slip up to the parlor immediately and let me know. Will you do it?"

"You bet, darling. But what is the racket?"

"You will know in good time. Now go inside, for I don't want the doctor to see us together."

"You ain't going to marry him, I hope?" Jack demanded, suspiciously.

"Well, I should presume not! I'm not particularly mashed on him!"

So Jack turned and re-entered the *cafe*, while Fan sauntered out through the gulch, thoughtfully.

"Thanks to the co-operation of the new landlord, everything is now arranged," she muttered. "Won't there be a sensation, though, if everything works up in shape, as I think it will?"

She chuckled softly, as she imagined the scene that was to follow.

Suddenly she paused and listened.

"I thought I heard some one following me," she muttered. "I don't see any one, however."

She kept on, but her ears were listening for a repetition of the sound; and again she halted, wheeled around, and—came face to face with Milt Manning, in whose hand was clutched a gleaming knife.

The knife fell from his grasp, however, when he perceived that Fan saw and recognized him, and he dropped upon his knees, with the exclamation—

"Thank God!"

Fan gazed at him a moment, with an expression of sternness, mingled with astonishment.

"For what do you thank God?" she demanded.

"For causing you to look around, and thereby saving me from bringing sorrow and disgrace upon the gray heads of my aged father and mother, who still live in the East!" was the husky reply.

"Then, you was about to murder me, eh?"

"I was sent to kill you—goaded on to do a crime at which my very soul rebelled. That is why I thank God that I am saved from the deed even if my intentions were guilty. I ask no mercy from you, for I do not deserve it. Shoot me down, and I will meet my deserved fate as a man."

Flush Fan gazed at him a moment, half-pityingly, then she stepped toward him, and seizing his hand said:

"Arise. I do not want your life, for, unless I am greatly deceived, you have learned a lesson you will not soon forget!"

The miner staggered to his feet, and with bowed head, made answer.

"Yes, I have learned a lesson I will never forget," he said, slowly, "and you have taught me it. May God bless and prosper you, ever, an' fergive me."

The last words nearly choked him, so great was his emotion; but he recovered himself with an effort, and continued:

"If you wish, lady, I will tell you who set me up to this job, and why."

"You need not trouble yourself," Fan replied. "I can guess. You may go, and if you like, drop into the parlor of the hotel about eleven or a quarter after eleven o'clock!"

Milt Manning bowed, and turning, strode away.

At half-past eleven that night, the parlor of the hotel presented rather an unusual appearance.

The parlor itself was a large room, reaching the full length of the building.

It was carpeted and furnished better than might be expected of a hotel-parlor in an out-of-the-way place like Hoop-la.

To-night, however, the most noticeable furniture were two tiers of chairs, one on each side of the room, and some twenty odd in each row.

Occupying ten of these chairs on one side, was Mohave Henderson and nine of his men; on the other side sat Milt Manning and nine of his men.

The lower end of the room was partitioned off by a curtain.

Near the other end sat Gilsey, the new landlord of the hotel and Doctor Lester; while, just in their rear, sat Gila Jack.

What did it all mean?

The answer was soon to come.

At the slight tinkle of a bell the curtains parted, and Flush Fan appeared.

Making a courtesy, she walked up the room to where the doctor was sitting.

"Doctor Lester," she said, pleasantly, "if you will take my arm, I will introduce you to the bride before the ceremony takes place."

The doctor arose, and she slipped her arm through his.

"I will take the doctor's other arm, I believe," Mr. Gilsey said, rising, and suiting the action to the word.

Then there was a ringing oath from the doctor.

But, too late!

His wrists were encircled by a pair of handcuffs, which he could not break.

The next instant he was thrown to the floor, and his feet securely bound, after which he was placed back upon the chair, and Gilsey sat down beside him, with a cocked revolver in hand.

Flush Fan then returned toward the curtain. "Gentlemen," she said, "I have arranged a little entertainment for you to-night, to which you all may listen. The first speaker will be Boyd Berwyn."

There was a murmur of surprise as the dwarf appeared before the curtain.

In almost the same words he had used in narrating to Dick, Junior, he told the audience his strange experience, concluding by mentioning how he had been rescued by Dick.

He then retired behind the curtain, with a bow.

Then Fan spoke again:

"The next person to address you will be Doctor Lionel Lester, of Cojeta! After which, Deadwood Dick, Junior, will appear."

She then went behind the scenes, and the real Doctor Lester appeared.

He was weak and quite pale, but went on to tell how the Widow Wren had hired him to represent that a child had been born to her, and, later on, had bargained with him to announce her dead, bury her—or pretend to—and then leave the country, while she stepped into his place, in a well-made-up disguise; and how she had tried to kill him, and he had been found in a ravine, by Flush Fan.

During these recitals, the false doctor sat rigidly on the chair at the opposite end of the room, with eyes staring glassily toward the curtain.

As soon as the real doctor was through, the curtain was drawn aside, and a strange tableau was revealed.

There sat Boyd Berwyn holding his little Bessie, while Miss Susan Wolf was doing the motherly to the younger babe.

Flush Fan then stepped forward:

"As Deadwood Dick is not quite ready to appear, I will myself tell you of his experience with this case. As I suppose you all know, yonder prisoner is the Widow Wren, *alias* the bad wife of Mr. Berwyn here—and when I am

through, you will know who else she is, and how, like a sleuth-hound, he has hunted the beautiful demon down."

She then went on and told Dick's story, as he had related it to Berwyn, and concluded by saying:

"Now, you will see what Dick has done, as a detective, gentlemen—restored right from bitter wrong. And yet, posted up in this very town are papers offering a reward for his capture, dead or alive! Now, I wish to ask if it will not be well to tear those papers down, and meet Deadwood Dick as a man and a gentleman?"

There was a loud chorus of assent.

"Hurrah! that's the ticket!" cried Milt Manning. "Bring the chap out, an' by ther Eternal, we'll make him mayor of the town!"

"I will show you Deadwood Dick, Junior!" Fan laughed.

She put her hands behind her, and the next instant her female attire dropped to the floor; she tore a mass of blonde hair from her head, attached a small mustache to her lip, clapped a slouch hat upon her head, and there stood Deadwood Dick, Jr., holding a half mask in one hand.

A thundering cheer arose from the crowd.

"Gentlemen, I am pleased to know you," Dick said, "and my entertainment is over. But there is one thing more. What shall be the penalty of yonder wicked woman's inhuman crimes?"

"Death! The rope!" was the deep and awful response of two-score of voices.

"You need not trouble yourselves, gents," cried Gilsey, from the other end of the room, "for Old Grim has got his work in ahead of you. The woman is dead, and as she is getting stiff, she has probably been dead for several minutes!"

Examination proved his words to be true.

The beautiful demon was dead indeed.

She had escaped the fate of being hung by her enemies at least!

What shall we add, in conclusion?

From that time on, as long as he remained in Hoop-la, Deadwood Dick Junior was the hero of the hour. A petition was got up and liberally signed, to induce him to remain permanently in the camp, and become its mayor, but the young detective declined, and, after giving his former adopted child to Susan Wolf, who, later on, married Mohave, he left Hoop-la, accompanied by the best wishes of all.

Unless it was Gila Jack, who never could quite forgive the young detective prince for "drawing him on, and playing him for a fool," as he expressed it.

Jack has mended his ways, however, and having got "a new girl on the string," there is a matrimonial perspective, ahead.

More than she deserved, Marion, the beautiful demon, received a respectable burial.

Among her effects was found a considerable portion of the money she had taken from the Berwyn home, before she set fire to it.

This, of course reverted to Mr. Berwyn, who, with his child, settled down in Hoop-la, and now runs the hotel, as well as manages his claim, which has developed into a well-paying mine.

Mohave and Milt Manning are both in his employ. The latter is a model man, and never forgets to be thankful that he did not kill Flush Fan.

As for little Bessie, there is a fair prospect that she will fully recover her sight. She sees her papa now, and her precious doll, and is very happy.

Doctor Lester did not recover, but soon followed his murderer to the grave.

THE END.

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